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CONTRASTING LOVE AND LAW

IN THE

OLD TESTAMENT

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GENERAL FACULTY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON BACHELOR OF DIVINITY DEGREES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF DIVINITY

BY

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We, the undersigned, hereby certify that we have read and recommend to the School of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled CONTRASTING LOVE AND LAW IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, submitted by Robert Talbot Thomson, B.Sc., in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity.

We are now prepared to understand why it is good for Israel to worship God. It is good because in worship she has discerned the source of her existence and the destiny to which she is called ... It is good because behind and within her life there is an ultimate love which comprehends all, judges in terrible wrath, and yet is merciful.

James Muilenburg.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN FOOTNOTES

Throughout this study various editions of the Bible, a number of Commentaries, Bible Dictionaries, Lexicons, etc., have been used as references. When using these various sources abbreviations have been used in footnotes for the sake of brevity. Below these abbreviations are explained. The reader is referred to the Bibliography at the end of the study for more complete information regarding these works.

BIBLES

Jewish - The Holy Scripture According to the Masoretic Text: A New Translation

KJV - King James' Version

Knox - A translation from the Latin Vulgate in the light of the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. The major work on this version was done by Monsignor Ronald Knox. It is, therefore, popularly known as the Knox Version.

Moffatt - A translation by Professor James Moffatt in the modern idiom.

NEB - New English Bible, the most recent scholarly translation of the New Testament done by leading English scholars.

RSV - Revised Standard Version, the most popular modern translation by virtue of its adoption for use in most churches of the English speaking world.

BDB - A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Chas. A. Briggs.

IB - Interpreter's Bible

IDB - Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible

NT - New Testament

OT - Old Testament

CHAPTER ONE

AN OUTLINE OF TERMS

The Problem of the Thesis

It is always a risky business to attempt a study in the field of Biblical Theology which in any way is limited in scope. When the study has to do with determining the meaning and contrasts of particular Biblical concepts the task becomes even more difficult. As Dr. C. Ryder Smith says in his book The Bible Doctrine of Grace:

"There is something arbitrary in defining the scope of a study in any branch of Biblical Theology, for on examination, the latter is found to be an integrated whole, every part implying every other. It is as if a botanist set out to study the roots of trees by themselves, or their trunks or flowers. Such subjects can only be isolated artificially." ¹

Nonetheless, it is our feeling that such limitation is justified in dealing with Love and Law in the Old Testament: (i) for reasons of available space and time; and (ii) as a specific contribution to wider studies in the field of Biblical Theology. Both concepts are primary to the Hebraic understanding of God's relationship to His chosen people, Israel. Semitic culture cannot be understood apart from a knowledge of Law. (The most familiar code of laws outside the Bible is that of Hammurabi, King of Babylon, now dated late in the eighteenth century B. C.) And of course, what is of greater significance is the fact that God's love is expressed to Israel in His covenant relationship with her, a covenant based on a foundation of law. It should, therefore, be

1. C. Ryder Smith, The Bible Doctrine of Grace, p.5

simple to see a close and direct bond between the concepts of love and law in the Old Testament. Are they two sides of the same coin? Are they another example of "dialectical complementation" in Semitic thinking? Why, we might ask, need there be concern over the contrast between love and law?

Herein lies the basic thesis of this study. In spite of the fact that God's love is expressed in a relationship of covenantal law with His chosen people, Israel continually breaks the covenant through sinful rebellion. Through rescue, re-creation, and renewal, she remains God's People. Gradually the relationship becomes formalized, stereotyped into slavish ritual, externalized by men. This is really the most subtle form of rebellion on their part. For, as the Covenant becomes, as far as men are concerned, more and more a legal code to be adhered to, it becomes less and less a matter of inner commitment, in faith, to God. It is this externalized, legalistic, misinterpretation of the concept "Law" that will be contrasted with "Love" which essentially represents the dynamic relationship God forges first at Sinai and ultimately at Calvary.

The Method of the Thesis

This first chapter must then be something of a synopsis of the rest of the study. It will take the form of a word study determining the uses and meanings of "Love" and "Law" in the Old Testament. A later chapter will examine how these concepts changed in the period just before Christ. Although this inter-testamental period is not strictly a part of Old Testament times, it is still important to any study which is made from the Christian standpoint. It is impossible for us

to avoid ending such a study with Jesus Christ and his unique understanding of and interpretation of "Love" and "Law" as basic to man's relationship with God. Furthermore, it is necessary to realize that the milieu of Palestinian Judaism into which Jesus came had historical antecedents in addition to those of the Old Testament. This was not the Israel of the eighth century prophets or of their successors at the time of the Exile. Nor was it the Israel of post-exilic Judaism, best exemplified by such writing as Ruth, Jonah, and Daniel. Rather it was an Israel that had as its heritage those times represented by these and other canonical writings plus the period following the last of these books. This would encompass a span of about a century and a half. In addition to this, there were influences in Judaism not represented in the Old Testament but nonetheless real in Jesus' day. These can be understood in part through an examination of the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, and the prevalent factions in Judaism at the time of Christ such as the literary remains of the Qumran sectarians.

All of which is meant to say that if our belief in an historical faith is justified then Jesus' unique concept of God's relationship to man through a "covenantal law", a "Law of Love" must have roots in the Hebrew-Israelite-Judaic life of which he was a part. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that Judaism itself stresses belief in an historically-grounded faith. Perhaps some might consider it presumptuous to think it necessary to spell out the importance of other background influences besides those contained in the

Old Testament on the life and ministry of Jesus. However, it should be remembered that intentionally or not we often forget those forces outside the Old Testament record that undoubtedly affected our Lord. Also we must remember that though the covenant had been equated with a narrow, externalized adherence to an extensive law code when Jesus came, the thread of the love ethic tracing back through the prophets to Moses and the patriarchs was still there.

The Sources of the Thesis

Throughout this word study there will be considerable reliance upon three sources. They are mentioned at this time so as to keep the use of footnotes from becoming excessive. From the "Bible Key Words" series translated from Gerhard Kittel's Theologisches Worterbuch Zum Neuen Testament we have used "Love" by Quell and Stauffer and "Law" by Kleinknecht and Gutbrod. Professor Norman Snaith's The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament has been invaluable as a theologically interpretive discussion of these terms.

Love in the Old Testament

At the outset it is necessary to determine the appropriate words used in the Old Testament to signify "love". Secondly, it will be necessary to briefly outline the meanings of these words in secular and religious usage. However, as we are primarily concerned with "love" in terms of God and his relationship to man, and as all secular relationships are dependent upon a man's place in the sight of God, it is the latter of these two categories with which we will be most concerned. It might be added here that a similar emphasis will

be made in the discussion of "law".

Quell and Stauffer refer to two primary root words in Hebrew as the most common ones used to express the idea of love.² The first of these is 'ahebh (אָהַב) and is used in relation to both persons and things or actions as well as being used, (in the derivative noun form אֲהָבָה), to describe God's unconditioned love. Snaith, therefore, calls 'ahabha God's Election-Love.³

The second basic root given by Quell and Stauffer is racham (רָחַם) which appears, with one exception,⁴ only in the intensive (Pi'el) form meaning "have compassion" and in the passive of the intensive form (Pu'al) meaning "be shown compassion". Because it has this connotation of active concern for those in need of help it is often used to express the love of God. Indeed the adjective רַחוּם (merciful) is always of God.⁵ Other roots to be considered are chaphec (חָפַץ) and

2. The basic root of most Hebrew words is a verbal form. Unlike English and many other languages in which the infinitive is this verbal form, in Hebrew the third singular masculine perfect of the simple form, (known as Qal), is the root. (e.g. שָׁבַר, he broke) Unless otherwise indicated it is this root that is given throughout this study. Transliteration follows the key given in Davidson's Hebrew Grammar. Some variations are according to Norman Snaith in The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament.

3. Snaith, op.cit., p.95

4. Psalm 18:1 where the first singular imperfect Qal with the second masculine singular verbal suffix is used (אֶרְחַמְךָ) meaning "I love thee" or "I shall love thee". However, scholars feel this is a gloss, the correct word being (אֶרְמַמְךָ) which means: "I shall exalt thee". See B.D.B., p.933 and I.B., vol.4, p.93

5. B.D.B., p.933 - in the sense of "saving love".

racah (רָצָה), both followed by the preposition (לְ) indicating the object of one's pleasure. All other roots are confined to secular usage or are so limited in their reference to God as to be of no consequence in this study.⁶

An interesting omission from Quell and Stauffer is the word chesedh (חֶסֶד).⁷ Snaith says that Luther, in his German translation of the Old Testament, used the word "gnade" for chesedh which was the same word he used for charis (grace) in the New Testament. Perhaps in the original German of Kittel's "Word Book" chesedh is treated as grace and, therefore, is omitted here. However, we agree with Snaith's conclusion that it is basic to the nature of God's love toward man. In his differentiation between חֶסֶד and אֶהְבָּה he says:

"The difference lies in the fact that chesed, in all its varied shades of meaning, is conditional upon there being a covenant. Without the prior existence of a covenant, there could never be any chesed at all... On the other hand, 'ahabah is unconditioned love... 'Ahabah is the cause of the covenant; chesed is the means of its continuance. Thus 'ahabah is God's Election-Love, whilst chesed is His Covenant-Love."⁸

6. However, mention should be made of two of these other roots: רָצָה and אָהַב. The first of these has the connotation "to wish well", a natural feeling toward the object of one's love. Thus the common noun, רָצוֹן, in reference to God is translated "grace" and means active concern for the object of His love. (cf. note 24, p.240, Koehler, OT Theology). The second root has the basic meaning "to choose or select" but also can mean "to love" when "God chose or elected Israel" is understood as another way of saying "God loves Israel". (cf. Isa. 41:8, 9)

7. Second declension noun.

8. Snaith, op.cit., pp.94f

The last sentence of this quotation summarizes the approach to the concept of "Love" throughout this study.

It is necessary, before turning to the concept of "Law" in the Old Testament, to examine briefly Quell and Stauffer's survey of "Love" in secular and religious usages. As intimated earlier it must be remembered that sharp distinctions which attempt to divide life into specific realms such as secular and religious are foreign to the Hebrew way of thinking. The student of the Old Testament is, therefore, continually confronted by a dilemma. He must take care not to divide and sub-divide what is essentially indivisible, (to be true to the original Hebraic thought), and yet he must also seek to bring some order out of what appears to be chaos for the sake of his "scientific-minded" brethren of the modern era.

Having said this we move on to make such a division always keeping in mind that in Hebrew and Hebraic life and thought there is rarely a case of simple, unequivocal "either-or". Fundamentally in the Old Testament love is a spontaneous feeling⁹ leading to self-denying sacrifice (Lev. 19:18, 34) or, with things, to grasping that which awakens desire, or to acting in that way which gives pleasure. It is reasonable to assume that the ultimate ground and origin of the idea "love" is only found in the love of person for person. As Quell says, "where things or occupations are said to be loved, the language

9. Jeremiah 31:20 where the KJV translation "... my bowels are troubled for him;" is more picturesque and captures the spontaneity much better than the RSV's "... my heart yearns for him;", see also Exod. 33:19

seems faded and metaphorical ..."¹⁰ Certainly in the religious sense personality is basic to an understanding of love. Everywhere in the Old Testament God's love implies His personality and to love Him without the aid of any image means loving God simply as God.

Secular love in its simplest usage means the vital urge of the sexes toward each other, standing out as an independent force over against law. The word 'ahebh' and its derivatives are often used in this way indicating sexual desire by Ezekiel, Hosea, and Jeremiah.¹¹ Although these instances use the picture of sexual love as a sign of evil, the love between man and woman is not typically seen as such. Indeed it is seen as a gift of nature for which to be thankful, especially the love binding husband and wife together (cf. the Genesis stories of Creation; I Sam. 1:8). Passionate love receives its finest description in the Song of Songs 8:6: "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love (אֶהְבֶּה) is strong as death". But love, as does hate in the sexual realm, reveals a brutal nature. The stories of Amnon and Tamar (II Sam. 13:1-22) and Samson and Delilah (Judges 14:16) lead to the necessity of the Law dealing with unbridled symptoms of sexual attraction and repulsion (Deut. 21:15ff.; 22:13ff.; 24:1ff.)

In the areas of personal relations of love which have

10. Quell and Stauffer, op.cit., p.3

11. e.g. Ezek. 16:33, 36, 37; Hosea 2:7; 4:18; Jer. 22:20, 22. In all these instances Israel is compared to the prostitute seeking her lovers.

no possible connection with sex, namely, family relationship, friendship and legal association, there is some difficulty in separating meaning from that having to do with sex. It is not possible¹² in Hebrew to express the difference between Eros, Agape and Philia as in Greek although it is recognized:

"I am distressed for you my brother Jonathan;
very pleasant have you been to me;
your love to me was wonderful,
passing the love of women." (II Sam. 1:26, RSV)

It would seem that the Old Testament writers were so impressed by what is common to both expressions of love that they did not use different words by which they could stress the differences.¹³ Non-sexual love springs out of the depths of one's soul and, as with Jonathan's love for David, becomes part of the very stuff of his life: (נַפְשׁוֹ) k^enaphsho - "as his own soul", (I Sam. 18:1, 3).

This is a high point in the Old Testament of the intensity of feeling that love can engender. But it is also illustrative of one of the most important facts of Old Testament ethics, namely, that love is regarded as inseparable from humanity and is, therefore, the "rule of thumb" for all social relationships. As such it is an indispensable part of the divine law. Herein lies the crux of the contrast between

12. This is perhaps a bit extreme for, as we have seen, the Hebrew has a wide variety of words to choose from to signify the various expressions of "love". However, the implication holds true for the Greek is more precise than the Hebrew with its word-images. The Semite did not reason by logic as did the Greek. For him words had a different purpose.

13. Quell and Stauffer, op. cit., p.5

"Love" and "Law" as indicated earlier. Love is fundamental to life itself and cannot really be legally commanded.

But here the lawgiver was faced with an almost insurmountable dilemma. It is simple for us to assume that the framers of the law code (known as Torah) were unfeeling ciphers intent upon confining Israel within a strait-jacket of legalistic minutiae. For many this became the end result but it was not the initial objective of the leaders of the faith. These were men who had come to know the fullness of God's love in their own lives and sought to bring their fellows to the same richness of life they knew as a result of that love. But most men lived by the volatile "rule of their passions" and so, at least in the beginning, the intent of the Torah was to regulate love. Laws only became necessary because of aberrations in love. Licentious love had to be "commanded" for the best interests of the majority. However, the end result was the loss of love under a mountain of rules and regulations.

Thus Jesus was able to get back to the heart of the lawgivers' objective when he summarized the Law in the two commandments upon which "depend all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:40):

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and the first commandment. And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-39).

In a sense it was this cutting through the legalistic red tape of the Judaism of his day to the heart of the Law (Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18) that gave historical grounding to the Law of Love that Jesus characterized in his person and his ministry.

Regardless of how much the Jew tried to make the law into a narrow particularism that concerned itself only with his salvation, the command to love always stands in judgment upon such legalism.

"The command to love, wearing the clothes of the law, reduces the law itself to absurdity, since it shows the boundary beyond which there can be no legislation, human or divine, and establishes the claim of a way of life that is above the law."¹⁴

In the area of love as seen in a religious context there is one factor which stands out as a necessary part of all specific instances of love between man and God. This is the underlying Covenant idea which is fundamental to all examples of religious love in the Old Testament. As Quell says:

"There can be no doubt that the Covenant is an expression in juridical language of the experience of God's love: the whole Covenant theory is based on the idea of love."¹⁵

However, it must be remembered that love as a basic aspect of the Covenant bond is never explicitly worked out in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy is the only place in which an attempt is made to show a relationship between God's love for man on the one hand and man's love for God on the other, with man's love for his brother men in between. Even here, (Deut. 10:14-16), the appeal is rather remote seeking man's love for God through faithfulness to the Law because God first loved not him but his fathers, the patriarchs. It is true that in each generation it is the duty of the Jew to imagine that he him-

14. Ibid., p.8

15. Ibid., p.11

self has come forth out of Egypt and so, figuratively, he renews the Covenant at Sinai through his repetition of the liturgical formulas of Deuteronomy. And yet the growing concern for specific outward observances as indicative of the inward allegiance to the Law tended to dull and eventually snuff out the inner fire of total commitment in the hearts and lives of many. We can say then, in spite of the underlying influence of love as basic to God's relationship to man in the Covenant, it is always muffled in the Old Testament by the biblical writers' concern for the Covenant's legal categories. Here again Jesus confounds the limitations of man-made laws. The real significance of Calvary from the human perspective is that Jesus' fidelity fulfilled the Law perfectly.

Having said this about the nature of the Covenant for the believer long after Sinai we must qualify it to some degree. The Old Testament is very much aware of love toward God by man as being a fundamental and indispensable part of true piety.

"... those who love God are the truly pious, whose life of faith bears the stamp of originality and genuineness: they seek God for his own sake."¹⁶

Such love, no matter how much it may be qualified by the boundaries set by the Law, is ultimately to be given unreservedly and to this degree betrays its irrational origins that defy all attempts at legislating and/or categorizing. It is for this reason that Deuteronomy 30:6 speaks of an unreserved love for God prompted by His "circumcision of the heart". Both

16. Ibid., p.12

Jeremiah (31:33) and Ezekiel (11:19) indicate dramatically the transformation God can effect in the lives of men who give themselves up with such devotion to Him.

Still the vexing problem of love as commandment faces us. As a requirement of the Law, when biblical records are read too literally, the Old Testament persistently sets the deed above the feeling as such. Essentially this means that a man has the power to love or not to love. But what this fails to see is the fact that though a man may exhibit the outward semblance of love through his faithful adherence to the Law, he can do so without any real inner feeling or commitment. Jesus saw this most clearly and so was able to castigate the religious pillars of the community as "white-washed tombs" (Matt.23:27), outwardly fine and upright but inwardly (where it really counts), empty and dead. This paradox of that which is described as law but really lies outside the limits of legal regulation is summarized in Deuteronomy 6:5 which Jesus calls the greatest commandment. Quell's paraphrase of this passage captures the essence of its meaning as Jesus used it:

"Thou shalt exert all thy powers, so that love may produce a disposition which will determine thy conduct; the cultivation of thy relationship to Yahwe requires the devotion of thy whole personality, heart (lebhabh לֵב) and soul (nepesh נֶפֶשׁ)."17

The Deuteronomist is aware that theory without practical application is worthless and so this commandment which enlists the

17. Ibid., p.14

power of love in support of loyalty to the Covenant is the result. Jeremiah (31:33) speaks of the New Covenant wherein God writes the law in the hearts of His People. Here the law has ceased to be law and has become a bond of love forged by God's unending quest for man's allegiance and man's response to Him. Only in Jesus Christ is the paradox resolved. For it is only in him that the culmination in Love is reached by the Law.

Before going on to a discussion of "Law" in the Old Testament it is necessary to look briefly at the two ways in which God's love is manifested in the Old Testament: Election-love and Covenant-love. Election-love, as indicated earlier, is expressed by 'ahabhah. It derives from the root '-h-b (אהב) which is very common in Hebrew, and can be used for any and every kind of love.¹⁸ The connection of the root with the idea of Election can be seen in the contrast between 'ahabh (love) and sane' (שנא, hate). This can be an extreme difference as in Malachi 1:2, 3 where God's hate for Esau (Edom) is said to be strong as His love for Jacob (Israel). But this is a questionable example because of the animosity between Judah and Edom that colors the writer's thinking. In Genesis 29:31 and Deuteronomy 21:15-17 are two cases of rival wives. In each instance 'the loved one' is the one who is preferred, and 'the hated one' is the other (cf. Matt. 6:24; 10:37; Luke 14:26ff.; etc.). Here we can see, (as in Malachi in spite of the writer's bias), that the root '-h-b is used

18. Ibid., pp.131f. and also above, pp.5f.

to indicate choice between values (preference) in both religious and secular contexts. This is the way in which the Covenant came into being. God loved Israel - that is He preferred her before all other peoples. She is His chosen or preferred or elected people.¹⁹

Such a love has certain characteristics that must be examined. To begin with it is an unconditioned love. God chose Israel and has known only them "of all the families of the earth". (Amos 3:2). The word "know" in Hebrew has a much deeper meaning than mere intellectual awareness.

"... when Amos says that Jehovah knows Israel, he is referring to the most intimate personal knowledge that is possible, ... The intellectual bias in the word 'know' is Greek; the Hebrew bias is personal"²⁰

God's choice of Israel had nothing whatever to do with any special merit, whether real or imagined, on her part. The schoolboy ditty:

"How odd of God,
To choose the Jews"

perhaps is more profound than it is intended to be for the element of chance is certainly there. All that can be said is that God found Israel and He loved her. Thus God says in Hosea 9:10:

"Like grapes in the wilderness,
I found Israel.
Like the first fruit on the fig tree,
in its first season,
I saw your fathers."

19. Snaith, op.cit., p.134

20. Ibid., p.135

This is most difficult for men to accept. Time and time again we say that it is impossible for God to love Israel unless there is something worth loving in the loved one. We can't admit that there is nothing in us worthy of God's love and it is hard for us to accept such a totally disinterested love. Because of our blindness at this point we are faced with some impossible mental gymnastics trying to make "Jack Truehearts" out of some of the worst bounders and cads known to history. The names of David and Jacob are two of the more prominent among many. We fail to see that God was not looking for goodness. Whether we like it or not we must accept the fact that God's love goes to those He chooses. It is the unmerited love of Charles Wesley's hymn, "He hath loved, He hath loved us, because He would love".²¹

Some would say that such love is irrational. But such a position assumes that the limits of man's reasoning powers encompass the limits of rationality. Others say that God's love is arbitrary. This is true to the extent that He chooses in ways that are unintelligible to us but in no way is His love capricious. God's thoughts are not ours nor are His ways our ways. "How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!" (Romans 11:33).

Perhaps the most difficult characteristic of God's love for men to accept is its exclusiveness. This is inevitable in a love that involves choice and speaks of "election". Though this is hard for many this exclusiveness is central to both

21. Methodist Hymn-book, London: Wesley Conference Office, 1904, #64 "God of all grace".

the Old and the New Testaments. The perennial question is: Why is this one chosen and that one rejected? To begin with God chose this one because He loved him. Secondly we can say that God rejects on the ground of persistent, unrepentant wickedness. Such rejection can include the seemingly chosen as well as those considered outside the pale. In Christ the accepted boundaries of acceptance and rejection were broken. Because of Christ as the supreme manifestation of God's love all men who turn to God in and through Him can find acceptance just as all can choose, in their rebellion, to be rejected.

The second category of God's love, namely, Covenant-love, is represented by the word chesedh (חֶסֶד). The root means "eagerness, steadfastness" and secondly "mercy, loving-kindness", but it must always be considered in terms of a covenant. This negates its meaning "kindness" in a general way.²² Thus the possibility of a syncretistic "watering down" of God's love for those with whom He first made the Covenant into a generalized benevolence for all men is avoided. Such a limitation was important but it resulted in a narrowing tendency that proved fatal to Judaism as we shall see later.

Whether it is used of God or of man, the importance of understanding chesedh in terms of covenant leads to the most appropriate English equivalent: faithfulness or leal-love. In instances where chesedh was used to signify a bond between two men there was the element of good faith involved. David's

22. For which Hebrew used the word chen (חֵן). See above fn.6, p.7

chesedh with Hanun (2 Sam. 10:1ff.)²³ and again with Jonathan resulting in his sparing Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 21:7), are examples of this. But the idea of the word chesedh meaning faithfulness is especially so in the Covenant between God and Israel. It holds true for both the firm faithfulness of God and the fitful faithfulness of Israel.²⁴ This is precisely the message of The Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. So the idea of firmness, strength, steadfastness is a central aspect of Covenant-love. It is worth noting though that the idea of eagerness and intense devotion persists:

"It is to be found in that sure love of God which will never let Israel go, and also in that loyal devotion of the Chasidim, whose firm devotion and willing sacrifice for the Law may have been equalled, but has never been surpassed (I Mac-cabees 2:42)."²⁵

God's love must always be understood as a Sovereign Love. It is never a relationship of equals, but it is a relationship between persons and so both love and law are involved. God is in the heavens; man is on the earth. His demand is for right

23. It is reasonable to assume that there is a note of condescending kindness on David's part in this instance. Perhaps his concern to maintain his suzerainty over Ammon as he had in the day of Hanun's father Nahash was his aim, rather than to maintain faith in an old covenant.
24. The frailty of man's faithfulness is expressed by two vivid similes: Hosea 6:4-"Your chesedh is like a morning cloud" (which vanishes with the first rays of the sun); Isaiah 40:6-"All man's chesedh is like the wild flowers" (i.e. it withers away as contrasted to God's steadfastness). In the latter instance this writer agrees with Snaith, op.cit., p.105 and Muilenburg, I.B., vol.5, pp.429-30 in their acceptance of the Targum rendering "strength" rather than the usual translation; KJV-"goodliness"; RSV-"beauty"; Moffatt-"glory".
25. Snaith, op.cit., p.106

conduct on the part of man, not only to Him but to one's fellow-men. Thus God's continual concern for the oppressed and His constant vigilance that justice be done on earth (Amos 5:11-15, 24). In response to God's love that of Israel is of an inferior to a superior. "Israel's chesed in respect of the Covenant was obedience and duty to the things God required".²⁶ Lastly it must be remembered that this love, dutiful and humble though it was to be, was not to be given because of an enforced obedience. The zenith of this dutiful obedience and humble love to God came in such rabbis as Hillel and Akiba and in the teachers of the first two centuries of the Christian Era.²⁷ Jesus came and was crucified by another strong force in Judaism of the same period. The relationship of Jesus and his understanding of God's love to the Judaism of his day will be examined later. It is significant to conclude at this point that in spite of the fact that love and law were understood in their proper relationship by many in Jesus' day, decisive power was in the hands of the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin who deliberately misinterpreted God's commandment of love and thus prevailed in their opposition to Christ.

Law in the Old Testament²⁸

Without doubt the term "Torah" (תּוֹרָה) is the most widely

26. Ibid., p.141

27. Cf. Geo. F. Moore's classic Judaism on the Tannaitic rabbis.

28. Additional sources used extensively in this section are: Ludwig Koehler's Old Testament Theology, chap.53, "Commandment and Law", pp.201-209; and C.H.Dodd's The Bible and the Greeks, chap.2, "The Law", pp.25-34.

used word in Hebrew to be understood as "law". Our English rendering "law" is traced back to the Hebrew through the Latin lex and the Greek nomos (νόμος) found in the LXX. Unfortunately much is lost in the transitions for none of the language equivalents give an accurate understanding of the broad meaning of the original in Hebrew. Added to this is the confusion of meanings in the original Hebrew. תורה comes from the root תר²⁹ which means "to throw or cast". Determining its meaning on the basis of its etymology is very difficult but the consensus is that it means "instruction or direction" and in a more specific sense "law".

Our difficulty is further compounded by the fact that "Torah" came to mean "law" in two distinct and, to a degree, separate senses. First, as "The Law" it signifies the overarching, all-inclusive commandment of God which is known by word, intuition, and historical circumstances. An example of intuition is David's concern in I Sam. 24:5 when "his heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt." Here לב, heart, is almost equivalent to conscience and indicates the revelation of God's will, not in a specific written or spoken command but through His disturbance of David in the midst of an evil act. In the second place "torah" is used to designate the various codes of law developed and revised periodically as pragmatic expressions of man's fulfillment of God's Law. That

29. As Kleinknecht and Gutbrod indicate (op.cit.,p.43,fn.3) this derivative source for torah has been challenged by some scholars but no adequate alternative has been proposed.

is to say these collections were the written expression of God's Will. Trouble resulted when the laws came to be accepted in themselves as "The Law".

"... since 'the' law does exist - a modern theologian would say 'in the mind' but the Bible does not say so - it must be capable of being reduced to one body, one collection of (necessary) laws. The law codes are the law in words. If it did not exist, they would not exist. But it is not the laws which make the law, but the law which makes the laws --- It is only when Judaism at the end of the Old Testament revelation becomes torpid and dead that the sense of this spirituality and freedom of inspiration is lost."³⁰

Such a distinction between הַחֹק, the law, and חֻקִּים, the laws, must always be kept in mind. The latter unite to express the former which is never fully expressed but is always fully in operation.³¹ To be sure, the laws were rightly considered to come from God for they were His instructions given to the people by Him through the offices of the priests who recorded them. There was, though, the continual danger of assuming the Law was automatically resident in the laws resulting in men thinking they could observe the laws without accepting God's claim to lordship over their lives in and through the Law:

"The priests did not say, 'Where is the Lord?'
Those who handle the law did not know me ..." (Jer. 2:8)

"How can you say, 'We are wise,
and the law of the Lord is with us'?
But, behold, the false pen of the scribes
has made it into a lie." (Jer. 8:8)

In both instances, the Law and the laws, the basic essential in torah is not the form but the divine authority.³² As we have

30. Koehler, op. cit., pp.206-7

31. Ibid., p.207

32. Kleinknecht and Gutbrod, op. cit., p.44

seen, without this torah becomes an empty vessel. Though in and of itself it does not cause this, the work of the Deuteronomist resulted in the change in meaning of torah to the legalistic interpretation prevalent in Jesus' day. Where individual instructions of the law had been signified by תּוֹרָה the laws, they are now called the words of the torah (דְּבַר תּוֹרָה). Deuteronomy is called "a book of the torah" in later writings and the way is paved for the eventual direct equation: תּוֹרָה = הַתּוֹרָה.

There is, however, another very important meaning for torah which remained closer to the original idea of the Law. This was the prophetic תּוֹרָה. Unlike the priests, the prophets were not in the position to make pronouncements having the force of law and what is more their teachings were not confined to ordinances related to the ceremony or moral prerogatives of the cultus. For the prophets' torah was usually equated with דְּבַר יְהוָה, "the word of the Lord". These utterances on the part of the prophets were understood in terms of and came to have the force of torah. They were:

"... concerned with the character of God, the interpretation of His past dealings with Israel and the declaration of His purposes for Israel in the future, with the call of repentance, and with the broad principles of morality, rather than with positive precepts."³³

Thus for the prophets torah was understood in a much broader way than "law" as a code of commandments and statutes. For them it was seen as divine revelation in the widest sense, appealing to a man in every aspect of his being: spirit, mind

and body. An example of this parallel between "the word of the Lord" and "the law" is found in Isaiah 1:10:

"Hear the דְּבַר יְהוָה, you rulers of Sodom!
Give ear to the תּוֹרָה of our God, you people of
Gomorrah!"³⁴

So in summary we can say that torah had several shades of meaning but all directly relating to the singular and unavoidable fact of God's claim upon man's obedience and complete trust. Initially it had to do with the divine command whether oral or written. Gradually the written law exemplified by Deuteronomy came to be the primary meaning considered when torah was referred to. But even at this time, as in earlier centuries, the unique charismatic pronouncements of the prophets characterized by the phrases: כֹּכֵן אָמַר יְהוָה - "thus says the Lord" and שָׁמַע דְּבַר יְהוָה - "hear the word of the Lord", gave to the understanding of torah a dynamic quality akin to the feelings aroused by a meaningful rehearsal of the events of the Exodus and the Sinai Covenant. For many this wider comprehension of the meaning of torah remained, even to Jesus' day. But such was not the case among the scribes and other legalists who, unfortunately, held the balance of power and interpreted torah in a narrow, stifling way.

Of lesser importance to this study are other words found infrequently in the Hebrew with the meaning of "law". We will only make passing reference to them here. The first of these

34. The KJV translates תּוֹרָה as "law" while the RSV uses "teaching" indicating that Isaiah, who is no rebel, means the authoritative instruction given by a priest or prophet. Cf. R.B.Y.Scott, "Exegesis of Isaiah 1-39", I.B., vol.5, pp.170-71

is מִצְוָה (mitzwah) which means commandment. It is used for a specific order given by a superior to an inferior and has to do only with the individual situation in most cases. An example of this is found in Solomon's reference to an order he had given earlier to the peasant Shimei in I Kings 2:43. However, there are instances where מִצְוָה is used in reference to God when it can mean the sum-total of His commandments. Such a use is covered by the singular as in Ezra 10:3: "... the commandment of our God"; and in Deut. 8:1: "All the commandment which I command you this day you shall be careful to do".

A second word of less frequent use but scarcely distinguishable from מִצְוָה in meaning is פֶּה (choq). It derives from the verb פָּרַח - "to cut", illustrating the fact that a permanent record of statutes was engraved on tablets of stone or metal. As mentioned above the meaning of פֶּה is closely related to that of מִצְוָה. However, it is often used to indicate what we would call laws of nature as in Job 38:33: "... the ordinances of the heavens". The feminine form פְּרָה is frequently used and indicates something concrete more often than פֶּה.³⁵

Finally we come to the word מִשְׁפָּט (mishpat) which comes from the verbal root שָׁפַט - "to judge", "to set things right". It is, therefore, an act of judging or its result, judgment. As with other ancient peoples, among the Hebrews decisions in the courts were made on the basis of former judgments which formed a body of case-law. It was in terms of such secular

35. Koehler, op. cit., p.204

usage that **חֻשׁוֹן** derived its particular meaning. The precedents of case-law naturally formed into rulings thus establishing just claims and/or demands before the law. In the religious sense **חֻשׁוֹן**, therefore, came to mean, in reference to God, the just claims of God as for example in Deut. 12:1: "These are the statutes and demands ..." (**הַחֻשׁוֹן וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים**).³⁶

36. Ibid., p.205. It is interesting to note that the exact connotation of "demand" is not implied by most English translations. Here are a few of the renditions: RSV - statutes and ordinances; KJV - statutes and judgments; Moffatt - rules and regulations; Knox - laws and decrees.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONCEPT OF LAW IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Before proceeding to the study of Love and Law in the Old Testament it is necessary to outline Israel's relationship to other peoples of the ancient Near East, specifically in the area of law and legal tradition. The covenantal relationship of Israel to God was unique but it had a close tie with previous patterns of law and community regulation. God's chosen people became just that, a people set apart, but their background was one common to other peoples of the Semitic cultures in Northwest Mesopotamia, technically called "Northwest Semitic". We can say that these people shared a heritage of tribal life and to some degree of settled agrarian existence that had advanced beyond the level of wandering nomadism. Such a way of life had a fairly well developed system of legal tradition and procedure based on customs widely prevalent in the ancient Near East.

"Treaties or covenants were made between tribes (Gen. 31:43-54; Gen. 34). Such arrangements were sanctioned by an oath ceremony in which the parties to the covenant each pledged to uphold the agreement and invoked the curse of God (or the gods) against themselves if they should not remain faithful to the agreement."¹

As this is not a subject of basic concern for this study it is necessary for it to be dealt with in outline form. However, the reader is encouraged to explore further in the bibliographic sources for he will be well rewarded for his efforts. First, in tracing Israel's background, it is neces-

1. Walter J. Harrelson, "Law in the Old Testament" I.D.B., vol.K-Q, p.78

sary to outline the history of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, better known as the "Fertile Crescent" and referred to as the "Cradle of Civilization".² It was out of this area that all nations of Israel's day traced their origins. At the beginning of the Iron Age which came about the end of the second millenium before Christ, when Israel emerged there was already a tradition of some two thousand years of generally advanced civilization, the so-called Bronze Age in the history of man. Various groups living along the rivers and arable lands of Mesopotamia had a highly organized system of religion. There was a flourishing commerce and patterns of living were determined by a venerable fabric of ancient tradition. In the cities there were developed institutions of long standing. People harbored strong feelings for their local god (or gods) and his property, the city or state. There was a vivid sense of national allegiance, in a word: patriotism.

There were three great historic epochs in the area:

- i) Third millenium B.C.
 - Sumerian with a brief Semitic (Akkadian) interlude.
- ii) Second millenium B.C.
 - Semitic (Amorite) with Babylon as the centre of political power.
- iii) First millenium B.C. 'til 538 B.C.
 - Semitic with Assyria as the centre of power, though often challenged, until the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C. Authority then passed to Babylon again and was exercised from there until

2. We are indebted here to Dr. T. Fish's chap.: "Law and Religion in Babylonia and Assyria", pp.29-43 in Law and Religion edited by E. Rosenthal.

the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 538
B.C.³

There were certain basic factors in the history of the Fertile Crescent which became part of the Israelitic tradition, others which Israel opposed or did not experience. Perhaps the most important of these was the fact that Mesopotamia was not a highway between continents as were Syria and Palestine. This is not to say there was not cultural turmoil in this area. On the contrary, Mesopotamia was, throughout Biblical times, an area of constant flux and change. Contrasted to this was the stability of Egypt where some thirty dynasties quietly marched down the centuries with scarcely a ripple of unrest. Mesopotamia was not at all like that! But in comparison with the Palestinian Corridor it was relatively quiet. It is impossible to think that the peoples of the Fertile Crescent were not active "travellers" on this "highway". Still the fact that the interplay of diverse peoples and systems was not as immediate or extensive as in Palestine and Syria must be kept in mind when comparing the legal patterns of the two areas.

Secondly, the pattern of political organization differed. Indeed this was an area where Israel remained unique. Where other nations had city or temple states ruled by kings,

3. It must be remembered that this focus upon Mesopotamia leaves out those other areas of considerable cultural activity at this time: Egypt to the Southwest; Persia to the North; and Greece and Rome on the outlying reaches of the then known world. Our interest is localized because of the fact that the earliest tribal beginnings of the Hebrew peoples God welded into "His chosen people Israel" were in Mesopotamia.

either military or hereditary, or by lords or "tyrants", Israel persisted in a tribal organization as the ideal. The symbol of unity was the Ark at a central sanctuary and the tribes were held together around this sanctuary by a sacred compact or covenant.⁴ It was only because of Philistine pressure that the Israelites finally established a monarch "like all other nations" (I Sam. 8:5). God was seen as the direct ruler of the people so that no permanent political leadership was believed necessary. Previous to the monarchy God raised up leaders on whom He conferred a special gift of His Spirit which gave them the ability to deal successfully with the particular crisis. The Greek word for such a gift is charisma, thus these leaders were known as "charismatics". The Hebrew name for these men was shoph^etim (שופטים) meaning "judges" and coming from the verb meaning to decide or to judge, to set things right.⁵

There was a remarkable similarity in the pattern of legal contracts in Israel to that in pre-Israelitic Mesopotamia. The covenant relationship between two parties was the standard pattern of a legal contract. In the Bible the story of Jacob and Laban in Genesis 31 is an example of this on a rather primitive tribal level. This was a simple pact between equals but the

4. G. Ernest Wright, Biblical Archaeology, p.98. This ideal pattern broke down with the coming of the monarchy. Even later the Second Commonwealth restricted itself more by limiting itself to Judah tribesmen returned from the Babylonian Exile. The resultant narrow, legalistic religion is still prevalent in many factions of modern-day Judaism as exemplified by the rejection of Father Daniel by the state of Israel. (cf. Time Magazine, Dec.7/62, "Definition of a Jew", pp.68-69 and Dec.14/62, "A Jew No More", p.61)

5. See above, pp.25-26

basic pattern was the same as in the more elaborate agreements between kings of varying power. The national covenant between God and Israel was also an adaptation of this, however, in this case the pact is between a Great Ruler and a people who promise to be His loyal subjects, that is, not between equals.

It was in terms of such covenants that the everyday life of the ancient world was carried on:

"Peace was secured and given divine sanction by a covenant between two clans. In nomadic society men lived and moved and had their being in a society stabilized by covenants."⁶

Professor George Mendenhall in his monograph Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East finds remarkable parallels between the various international treaties of Western Asia during the second millenium B.C.⁷ Many of these characteristics are paralleled as well in the covenant between God and Israel. Treaties are of two types: the parity treaty between equals and the suzerainty treaty between a great king and a vassal. The Jacob-Laban pact referred to above is an example of the first type. It is the latter category that concerns us here for it is this that parallels the unequal relationship of God and Israel. The suzerain was not an ordinary king but was referred to as "the Great King" (II Kings 18:28; Hos. 5:13).⁸ Such a

6. Wright, op.cit., p.98

7. See Mendenhall, op.cit., pp.31-34 and Wright, op.cit., pp. 99-100. "Mendenhall defines covenant as a promise or bond which is made binding by an oath and which is undertaken between two legal communities where there is no other legal procedure or means of enforcement."

8. This second passage contains a reference to the king of Assyria called "King Jareb" (יָרֵב). The probable cor-

ruler is above ordinary kings and claims authority over them.⁹ This is precisely the role assumed by God with Israel. He is the Suzerain who has authority over all earthly powers, the "Lord of Hosts" (Ps. 24:10; 46:7).

There are six basic elements in the suzerainty treaties binding vassals in the second millenium B.C. as outlined by Mendenhall:

- i) Treaty begins with identification of the Great King: "Thus says X, the Great King ..." This recalls the early covenant passages of the Old Testament where God speaks in the first person (Exod. 20:1-2; Josh. 24:2).
- ii) Detailed historical background of the relations between the Great King and the vassal with an emphasis on the goodness of the former toward the latter. The parallel in the Old Testament is found in the historical description of what God has done for His people. Their history is narrated in terms of His mighty acts, (e.g., bringing them out of Egyptian bondage, Exod. 20:2).
- iii) Stipulations of the covenant, (i.e., the vassal's obligations). Though these vary there is always prohibition against vassals engaging in foreign relations with other powers. The Great King hereby describes his own interests while leaving the internal relations of the vassal king with his people undisturbed. Here we are reminded of the First Commandment to Israel prohibiting relations with other deities (Exod. 20:3; 34:14 and Josh. 24:14).
- iv) Command that the document must be deposited in the sanctuary of the vassal with the further requirement that it is to be read at regular intervals. In Israel a similar provision was made: Deut. 31:9-13 states that Moses wrote "this law" and commanded it to be read "at the end of every seven years".
- v) Invocation of the deities of the vassal and the Great

8. rect rendering is malki rabh (מלך רב) meaning "the great king". Cf. I.B., vol.6, p.621

9. See fn.23, p.19, chap.1 above and 2 Sam. 10:1ff.

King as witnesses to the treaty. In Israel such witnesses are absent. In Joshua 24 God says the people themselves are the witnesses. Later, when speaking of Israel's violations of the covenant, the prophets call upon the heavens and the earth as witnesses (Isa. 1:2; Hos. 2:21-2; Micah 6:2).

- vi) Treaty concludes with blessings or curses that will come to him who keeps or breaks the code. We don't know if the oldest Israelitic covenants with God had similar formulas. But the "Book of the Covenant", the "Holiness Code" and the Deuteronomic law all end with such injunctions (Exod. 23:20-33; Lev. 26; Deut. 27 and 28; also Josh. 8:34).

Mendenhall says that the provisions of the vassal treaty were binding only in the lifetime of the participants and had to be reconstituted when one or the other died. It was usually at such junctures that the vassal would seek to exert his own power if possible. This illustrates the worth of such contracts as a stabilizing force in international relations. The necessity of reframing a pact after the death of one party might explain the ceremonies of covenantal renewal in Israel (cf. Deut. 5:2-3).

Professor Mendenhall also points out that the Hittites and Romans did not have a word for contract or covenant and that the Mesopotamian words are not found in the treaties.¹⁰ In the past many have assumed that the covenant conception was late in Israel but in the light of this information it is wrong to think so simply because the term does not appear in all the places where we might expect it. We can, therefore, make the assumption that Israelite faith was given a framework which was borrowed and adapted from international treaties

10. Mendenhall, op.cit., p.31

of the second millenium B.C. The outcome was very different. For, while the national life of other peoples was involved with a great plurality of gods, Israel's focus of religious attention was single, upon the One True God, Holy and Eternal.

Furthermore, in spite of the striking parallels between the covenant of God with Israel and the structure of treaties in the surrounding cultures, the God-Israel covenant remained unique in many ways. Perhaps the most important of these was God's calling of Israel rather than her seeking Him to sanction her actions as was the typical approach to the gods by other peoples (Exod. 19:5-6). Secondly, it is in terms of historical event that Israel comes to know the nature of God's saving acts. The covenant does not come as the result of a decision among the Israelites to have a god to protect them but as the culmination of a series of events wherein God chose Israel as His people. "Israel saw in the series of events centering in the Exodus the living matrix of her faith." Central and pivotal in this series of events is the Covenant.

"The historicity of the covenant at this early time has been challenged, but without success. Not only the contention of the narratives themselves, but the subsequent development of Israel's life from Sinai onward needs this basis to give it the meaning which it professes to have. It is a covenant God who speaks covenant words to a covenant people and consummates a covenant relationship in a fateful covenant act."¹¹

This was not, as with Israel's neighbors, a chance, matter-of-fact relationship - one of many similar bonds. It was Israel's

11. James Muilenburg, "The History of the Religion of Israel", I.B., vol.1, p.299

focal point for every aspect of her existence. Without the Sinai-Horeb Covenant Israel was nothing. It was the very foundation upon which the Torah and indeed the entire Old Testament rests.

Coming to an examination of codes of law and the transaction of everyday legal business we see this even more vividly portrayed. In the pagan nations of the ancient world there was no independent religious tradition. The maintenance of justice and the protection of the community were the two functions of the king for which he was chosen by the gods. In fulfilling his functions the king exercised power in and through the religious tradition. This often resulted in the dividing line between religion and law becoming hazy or even non-existent. Such an arrangement made it simple for the ruling power to usurp the supposed power of the gods by making their demands suit his purposes. This is illustrated in the Code of Hammurabi. In some instances Hammurabi says the laws are the gift of the gods. At other times he claims them as his own work.

He says he was named by the gods "... to cause justice to prevail in the land." (C.H.i, 27-34)¹²
 "I established law and justice in the language of the land." (C.H.v, 20ff.)
 "The laws of justice, which Hammurabi ... set up" (C.H.R.24, 1-4)
 "... let him (future king) not alter the law of the land which I enacted, the ordinances ... I prescribed" (C.H.R.25, 68-70)

12. All quotations are from Theophile Meek's translation in James Pritchard's Ancient Near Eastern Texts, pp.164, 165, 177, 178 respectively. (C.H. - Code of Hammurabi; R. - Reverse)

But just below this last quote, as in numerous other instances, he says: "I, Hammurabi, am the king of justice, to whom Shamash committed law." (C.H.R.25, 95ff.)

Religious and legal obligations were not so closely identified in Israelite religion. As indicated in the structure of the suzerain-vassal treaty which was closely paralleled by the God-Israel covenant, internal legal obligations were established without the direct and immediate participation by God. But, and this is a primary point of uniqueness on Israel's part, all civil law was unavoidably permeated with the influence of the covenant with God into every corner of life. As an example of this the priests, serving as the civil servants of the king, were the administrators of justice and the custodians of the secular legal tradition. In examining the various law collections of the ancient Near East that are now available ¹³ one striking difference with the civil laws of Israel is noted. Whereas these codes have a preponderance of laws dealing with property as opposed to laws dealing with persons, in the Old

13. Harrelson, op.cit., pp.78-9: Law collections in chronological order:

- 1) Sumerian King Ur-Nammu of city of Ur (c.2050 B.C.)
- 2) Amorite King Bilalama of city of Eshnunna (end of 20th cent. B.C.)
- 3) Lipit-Ishtar, ruler of Sumero-Akkadian Dynasty in city of Isin (first half of 19th cent. B.C.)
- 4) Code of Hammurabi of Babylon (probable date - end of 18th cent. B.C.)
- 5) Hittite laws (mid-15th cent. B.C.)
- 6) Assyrian laws from Middle Assyrian Empire (15th or 14th cent. B.C.). But tablets we have date from Tiglath-Pileser I (12th cent. B.C.)
- 7) Small body of Neo-Babylonian laws (about end of 7th cent. B.C.)

Testament the opposite is the case.¹⁴ Not even in the time of the monarchy were men able to gain a position of absolute authority over their fellows for at all times their actions and the legal tradition of Israel stood under God's judgment (e.g., II Sam. 12:1-15 - Nathan's condemnation of David's adultery with Bathsheba).

However, in Israel as among her neighbors, religious obligations did tend to become legal obligations. Always the community moved in the direction of punishment for religious infringements as legal infringements as well. The result is the gradual codification of religious requirements in legal terms and the replacement of internal commitment with empty, external practice. To a degree the community's action is commendable for it dramatizes the reality of God's action in history. By punishing the outlaw the community protects itself from the divine wrath which would otherwise punish all.¹⁵ But in so doing the community really is seeking to displace God's authority. It is this Holy authority which is forever established over God's people Israel in the covenant. We shall now proceed with an examination of this covenant first made at Mount Sinai.

14. Ibid., p.80

15. Josh. 7, story of Achan; II Sam. 24:12-14 where sin of David brings calamity on the entire land; Jonah 1:11-12

CHAPTER THREE

ISRAEL'S DIVERGENCE FROM THE NORM - THE MOSAIC COVENANT

In the last chapter we saw how the covenant made between God and Israel paralleled to a remarkable degree the typical suzerainty treaty between a great king and a vassal. Now we shall concern ourselves with that aspect of the God-Israel covenant which sets it apart from all others. In all other covenantal bargains the participants on both sides were men or groups of men. They might be equals or, more often, a superior dealing with a vassal. But in either case the role of the gods was that of witnesses to the bond. Though the wrath of the gods was invoked against the one who broke the treaty, these supposed supernatural powers were not directly involved as parties in the transaction.

The covenant made at Sinai was of a different sort altogether. Here God comes to Israel with an offer. Jeremiah, looking back from a point six hundred years later in Israel's history, sees the essence of the offer in God's word:

"Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you." (Jer. 7:23)

God is seen as a king of kings who, though he has many semi-independent peoples under his control, has chosen the Hebrews as His own. His covenant, like that of a great king with a vassal, may be said to be imposed. But it is imposed upon a willing people.¹ It is a covenant which calls Israel to a

1. George A. F. Knight, A Christian Theology of the Old Testament, p.219

place of responsibility before God rather than to special privilege in the sight of God. Throughout the ensuing centuries after Sinai Israel sought to avoid her responsibility and to assume that her relationship was one of favor with God. Time and time again the prophets call her back to an awareness of her real role. Ultimately her role as God's instrument of redemption in the world is fulfilled through the person of Christ. But the struggle between right relationship to God and desired relationship to Him is a long and difficult one. It has its beginning at Sinai.

Before turning to the covenant itself we must first discuss briefly the material in the Pentateuch which tells us the story of the revelation at Sinai. The period spent at Sinai runs from Exodus 19:1 through the entire book of Leviticus to Numbers 10:11. Much of this material belongs to the late P (Priestly) source which dates from the fall of the nation in 587 B.C. It is valuable and will be referred to, but not as a primary source. Thus we can eliminate from our basic consideration: Exodus 25-31; 35-40; Leviticus and the portion of Numbers mentioned above. Most of the remainder belongs to the J (Yahwist) and E (Elohism) sources that we will study. This means the two sections in Exodus, chapters 19-24 and 32-34. These writings were set down in the period of the monarchy and reflect much of the early tradition dating back to the time of Moses.²

Moses was a man of heroic proportions no matter what

2. Bernard Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament, p.52

our terms of reference for looking at him may be. He was one of those very few "human mountains" in mankind's history around whom the tides of history swirl and eddy and in whom they find focal points. For Israel Moses was the human instrument of God in the two determinative "birthday" events of her history and faith. Because this was so we must beware of the legendary embellishments which surround the story of Moses. This is not to say that legend is bad and shouldn't have a place in the story, but it is to say that the use of legend often leads to distortion and a blurring of the important facts in the story. Most of the Moses story can be accepted as fact. Certain aspects of his life and work are important to this study.

Moses was born and raised in Egypt but was a member of the subjected Hebrew people. In spite of this he had a place of favor in the land being raised in the palace of the pharaoh. As a young man he was forced to flee from Egypt because of his murder of an Egyptain soldier he found mistreating one of his fellow Hebrews. He went to the land of Midian in the wilderness east of Egypt. He had a dramatic experience of God's presence at a mountain in the wilderness and was called by God (or Yahweh as he knew him) to return to Egypt and lead the Hebrews to freedom. This he did. Subsequently he led the Hebrews back to the mountain of his call where he was instrumental in their making a covenant with Yahweh.

These two events: the Exodus, wherein God brings His chosen people Israel out of bondage in Egypt and the Covenant at Sinai that seals their future as His people are the Alpha and Omega of the Israelite faith. Basic to both acts is God's

love for His people. It is for this reason that God's love is often categorized as Election-love and Covenant-love.³ Care must be taken that the basic characteristic of God's relationship to Israel is not forgotten. This basic characteristic is love.

Viewed from another perspective the Exodus may be seen as the objective historical fact of God's self-disclosure to Israel. By faith Israel sees in this event the meaning of existence and responds by accepting the Covenant which God offers to her. The actual circumstances of the covenantal act are not of primary importance to this study. Our basic concern is with the theological nature of the Covenant and its significance in the course of Israel's later history. But it is necessary for us to briefly outline the covenant event keeping in mind that there are certain problems of legend and symbolism that we cannot spend time discussing.

Arriving at the mountain some three months after their deliverance out of Egypt, the Israelites encamped before it. Moses ascended the mountain to Yahweh and was entrusted with announcing to the people the proposed covenant:

"Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the people of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples ..." (Exod. 19:3-5)

The covenant will rest on the historic fact of the Exodus:

"you have seen what I did ..." With these instructions Moses

3. See above, pp.15-20 and Snaith, op.cit., pp.94-142

called together the elders of the people and gave them Yahweh's message. They agreed to the terms and Moses, having returned to Yahweh, was told that He would come to the people on the third day hence. In the meantime Moses was told to consecrate the people in preparation for the making of the covenant. On the morning of the third day Yahweh came to Sinai manifested in a violent storm accompanied by thunder and lightning. Moses was called by Yahweh and ascended the mountain. Yahweh warned him that the people were not to approach Him for fear He would destroy them. At this point (Exod. 20:1-17) the Decalogue is recorded followed by the more extensive Laws of the Covenant (20:21-23:33). There is some question among scholars as to the extent of Israel's obligations when the covenant was first made. Rylaarsdam summarizes the problem as follows:

"It is improbable that any of these items in their present form was the original statement of Israel's obligation in the relationship. Certainly it is virtually impossible that all could have been integrally a part of the covenant from the first. But their present position stresses the fact that it is characteristic of large sections of the Old Testament, notably the Deuteronomics, to conceive of the covenant as a law."⁴

For the time being we will suspend further discussion of this question until the completion of the covenant-making ceremony. Having received the words of the Lord Moses returned to the people and told them His words and ordinances. The people responded with one voice saying: "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do." (Exod. 24:3). Moses

4. J. Coert Rylaarsdam, "Introduction and Exegesis of Exodus" I.B., vol.1, p.842

then erected an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars to symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel. Offerings were made and oxen sacrificed. Moses took the blood of the sacrifice placing half of it in basins and throwing the other half against the altar. Then he read the book of the covenant to the people and they repeated their pledge of obedience to God's Word. Following this Moses threw the blood in the basins upon the people saying: "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words." (Exod. 24:8) After this symbolic act with the whole people Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu along with seventy elders of Israel went up the mountain and ate a sacred meal in the presence of the Lord.

Moses was called by God to come to him on the mountaintop to receive: "... the tables of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." (Exod. 24:12) When he returned to the people he found them worshiping an idol. Already they had forgotten, or chosen to ignore their pledge to obey Yahweh and were bowing down to a golden calf made from their most precious worldly possessions. Furious, Moses broke the tables of stone and destroyed the idol. Many were put to death by the sword and Moses returned to the Lord in the hope of making atonement for the sin of his people. Yahweh sent a plague upon them and told Moses to lead them to the land promised to their forefathers: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As swiftly as Israel broke the covenant Yahweh reaffirmed it.

However, Yahweh did not simply accept the sinfulness of

Israel. In Exodus 33:1-3 God told Moses to lead the people to the promised land saying:

"I will not go up among you, lest I consume you in the way, for you are a stiff-necked people."

Moses sought God's assurance that he would go with Israel and uphold him in the task of leadership. Because of Moses' faith the renewal of the covenant was possible and was preceded by a theophany made to him alone. Yahweh told Moses to cut two tablets of stone like the first ones symbolizing His steadfast love and concern. Finally, when He came to Moses to write on the tablets the words of the commandments, He proclaimed:

"The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." (Exod. 34:6,7)

Thus is God's part of the covenant described. It remained for the children of successive generations in Israel to oscillate between a profound understanding and acceptance of the covenant and various positions of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the covenant's meaning.

From the outset the main problem encountered was that of determining the means of implementing the covenant in the daily life of Israel. It was one thing to accept the obligations of the covenant, another to show how the covenant affected one's day to day actions. As indicated earlier in the quote

from Professor Rylaarsdam there was, from earliest times, the tendency to conceive of the covenant as a law. Actually it can be questioned, as Martin Buber does, whether there were any stipulated conditions for Israel in the original covenant. He refers to the later "Song of Moses" found in Deuteronomy as indicative of the nature of the relationship Yahweh established with Israel. There are two verses in particular that he speaks of:

"Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,
that flutters over its young,
spreading out its wings, catching them,
bearing them on its pinions,
the Lord alone did lead him,
and there was no foreign god with him."
(Deut.32:11, 12)

As the eagle with its young so Yahweh takes up Israel girded only by His strength and the assurance of His covenantal promises. It is on the basis of this alone that the young eagle, Israel, learns to fly on its own. Here, says Buber, is election, deliverance and education, all in one. The next verse also indicates the nature of the original covenant. On the basis of it he says:

"... it must be assumed that no demand, after the fashion of a prerequisite condition for everything that was to follow, was made in it for a docile observance of the sections of the Covenant by Israel; but that the verse contained the up-to-this-point-unconveyed notification that YHWH wished to make a berith with Israel ... no conditions were originally stipulated therein, nor did any require to be stipulated."⁵

In other words the covenant is to be in terms of an inward set

5. Martin Buber, Moses, pp.102-3. Cf.Exod. 19:4-6a.

of the heart and mind in the pathway of the Lord's righteousness (Jeremiah 31:33). When rightly understood the covenant never allows for a "legalistic distortion of the relationship".

Throughout the establishment of the covenant at Sinai there is no question of the inequality of the two parties to the agreement: "... do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest he break out against them." (Exod. 19:24) Men are constantly reminded of God's terrifying power (Exod. 4:1-7; Num. 21:6ff.; 11:33) which should leave no doubt that:

"... the covenant he has created is no safe bulwark, behind which they can make cunning use of the divine power to prosecute their own interests. The covenant lays claim to the whole man and calls him to a surrender with no reservations."⁶

Having said this, we may assume that the fundamental obligation of Israel was other than a set of written stipulations or laws to be followed. However, we are still faced with ascertaining the place of the Decalogue and the Covenant Code. It is our considered opinion that the obligation on the part of Israel in the covenant with God was a commitment of the heart. The Hebrew would understand this from the very beginning in terms of the whole man. The outward sign of this commitment took the form of certain basic laws, namely, the Decalogue. This body of law fulfilled two functions: (i) for the individual it provided a guide to his actions as a member of the people of God; (ii) for the body-politic it was the concrete evidence of Israel's new sense of identification as a people and in parti-

6. Walter Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, pp.44-5

cular as the chosen people of God.

To attempt to determine what the law consisted of at the time of Moses and the original making of the covenant has resulted in a great deal of speculation. Final answers are not possible but it seems quite probable that the scope of Moses' legislative work is confined to the Decalogue "core" in Exodus 20:1-17.⁷ There is considerable difference of opinion regarding what this "core" consists of but the reconstruction of Professor Muilenburg seems valid.

God spoke all these words: I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves.

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for me any graven image or any likeness.
3. You shall not invoke the name of Yahweh your God in vain.
4. Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not commit murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house.⁸

There are two general types of law found in the Pentateuch: conditional (or case) law and absolute (or apodictic) law. Conditional law follows a set pattern: if this happens, then that will be the result. It is this type of law in the Old Testament that parallels many of the law codes of the ancient world. On the other hand, absolute law is straightforward and succinct. There are no "ifs or buts" about it. This is

7. Rylaarsdam, op.cit., p.842

8. Muilenburg, op.cit., p.303

the type of law we find here and it seems characteristically Israelite, expressing the unconditional nature of the covenantal demands upon God's chosen people.⁹

So we can conclude that the primary basis of the covenant was a sense of absolute responsibility to the will of God. This was confirmed by the establishment of the Law in the Decalogue. As we shall see later this becomes encrusted with an extensive body of casuistic law which tended to weaken rather than strengthen the basic Mosaic Covenant. However, we must not say that the extensive system of law was entirely bad. As an outflow of Moses initial work at Sinai came the "Book of the Covenant". This was to be an outward sign of an inner sense of commitment. But in post-exilic Judaism it came to be regarded as the Covenant itself. The result was spiritual stultification and narrowing of belief into a prescribed orthodoxy. However, one thing should be remembered. Unlike any other ancient legal code that which grew in Israel had a humaneness about it which must be traced to the bond of love existing from Sinai onward between God and Israel. Whereas in other societies the lawmakers were political rulers, in Israel they were largely priests and prophets. Hence while most codes were largely economic and political, that of the Hebrews was basically moral and religious. As an example:

"... there are religious and moral laws in the Hebrew Code that are conspicuous by their absence in the Babylonian, and a spirit of kindness and humanity that is not nearly so pro-

9. Anderson, op.cit., p.55

minent in the other ..."¹⁰

Therefore, what was later seen as the Mosaic Law brought into the world a new respect for human life. Only in the law code of Israel as opposed to all other ancient cultures including the Greeks was the slave able to find protection against the whim of his master:

"When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free for the eye's sake."
(Exod. 21:26)

Theologically there are two outlines of the covenant experience worthy of note. First the general significance of the covenant as described by Walter Eichrodt and secondly the interpretation of the relationship of Israel to God in the analogous terms of the marriage covenant as outlined by George Knight.¹¹ Professor Eichrodt says that the theological meaning of the covenant concept is revealed by certain factors. These are summarized as follows:

- i) The factual nature of the divine revelation
- this event at Sinai marked the beginning of a relationship between the Hebrews and their God, not in nature but historically in time. God is not known speculatively as an idea but in terms of a living confrontation with Him. Furthermore an actual situation in Israel's experience, the Exodus, is the historical situation which prompted this relationship.
- ii) God initiates the covenant which is both a demand and a promise
- "You shall be my people and I will be your God."

10. Theophile Meek, Hebrew Origins, p.76

11. Eichrodt, op.cit., pp.37-45 and Knight, op.cit., pp.219-20

From the outset there is a feeling of trust and security for men know where they stand with this God. The result is a unified world view among the Israelites and a robust affirmation of the goodness of this life.

iii) The covenant impressed a special character on the loose coalition of tribes

- in the covenant Israel gained a sense of historical self-awareness but not in a narrow nationalistic sense. That which unites the tribes and makes them a unified people is the will of God.

"... henceforward the idea of the Kingdom of God is in the air."

iv) Leading from this is a remarkable interior attitude to history

- this faith was founded on a fact of history and it is worked out in history. For the first time man gets off the treadmill of a cyclic existence and finds that in history God is working out His purpose.

v) There are safeguards against identification of religion with the national interest

- this is a religion of election, initiated by God and, should He desire, dissolved by Him. Though Israel's history included periods when the people sought to subjugate the covenant to the national interest, ultimately all such attempts failed.

Professor Knight's description of the marriage covenant as a pattern for the Sinai covenant helps us understand how love was basic to God's approach to Israel:

- i) The bridegroom paid purchase money for his bride and she became his property: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make yourself a graven image ... you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God ..." (Exod. 20:3-4)
- ii) The woman does not bring a dowry, rather the man bestows his property upon his bride. So in the sixth chapter of Exodus the Priestly writer gives a preview to Moses of the forthcoming covenant. It begins with the words: "I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they dwelt as sojourners." (Exod. 6:4)

"... once God offered marriage to this one branch

of all the descendants of Adam, then the whole situation of this people that was to become the Bride of God was altered. She was now no longer a wanderer ... or a stranger on the earth; now she had found the security of a husband and a home, and the permanent possession of a land of her own."¹²

- iii) Following the marriage ceremony it was quite natural to enjoy a wedding banquet. So too, following the ratification of the Covenant at Sinai, "the people sat down to eat and drink" (Exod. 24:11; 32:6). Some interpreters also see the period of wanderings in the Wilderness as a period of happy fellowship between the Bride and the divine Bridegroom. This may be extending the metaphor a bit too far.
- iv) Remembering that the Bride was wholly the receiver we can see how costly an experience the making of the covenant is for God, the Divine Husband. This "costliness" of God's redemptive action is illustrated by the frequent use of the verb padhah (פָּדָה) meaning "to ransom". First Israel is brought out of Egypt at the "cost" of the sacrifice of the pharaoh's son (Exod. 4:23). Again at the time of the covenant blood is shed, this time in symbolic sacrifice (Exod. 24:8). Later God saves Israel from Cyrus but at the cost of giving the Persian emperor vast territories in Africa: Egypt, Ethiopia and Seba (Isa. 43:3). Yet throughout there is always the note of love and pity on the part of God toward His Bride, Israel: "I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold in bondage ... I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians ... and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm ... and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God ..." (Exod. 6:5-6-7).
- v) Finally, just as the human husband reveals his inner soul to his bride, God makes a self-revelation: "I am the Lord" (Exod. 6:6). Israel can, therefore, come to know the assurance of a bride resting in the confidence she has in her lover: "... I will take you for my people, and I will be your God." (Exod. 6:7).

In conclusion Dr. Knight says:

"... marriage is a legal contract, to which both

12. Knight, op.cit., pp.220-21

parties assent before witnesses; ... it is also that moment when both parties, having plighted their troth, promise to be faithful and loyal to each other till their life's end. The Sinai Covenant is to be understood to contain both these aspects of the union at once."¹³

We have now examined at some length the nature and significance of the original Sinai Covenant. Realizing that there is difficulty in ascertaining the extent and content of the body of law associated with the covenant when it was first made we have accepted the theory that it was the Decalogue (Exod. 20:1-17) and of secondary importance the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:20-23:33). Before proceeding to an examination of the place of the prophets in the covenant relationship it is necessary to mention the intervening history.

Almost immediately there was division among the tribes. In spite of Moses' efforts to maintain unity two groups formed:

- i) The northern tribes (Joseph tribes) had the Ark of the Covenant.
- ii) The southern tribes (Judah group) had the tent of meeting.

Two cultic traditions thus developed at an early stage. Newman says that it was essentially over the resultant theological controversy that the kingdom divided in 922 B.C.¹⁴ The northern tribes said the covenant of Yahweh was made directly and fully with all the people (Exod. 19:3-6). The southern tribes said the covenant was made with the royal house of David

13. Ibid., p.223

14. Murray Newman, The People of the Covenant, pp.15-16. There were other factors of course: geographic, political, cultural, economic, etc. It required a David and the Philistine crisis to achieve the United Monarchy.

(II Sam. 23:5). It had its roots in the covenant at Mount Sinai which was not made directly with the people but first with Moses and only through him with the people (Exod. 34:27). An awareness of this distinction is important in evaluating the attitude of the eighth century prophets regarding the covenantal relationship. Much of the prophecy of these men was dependent upon whether they came from the Northern or Southern Kingdom and to whom they addressed themselves. Yet God's Word was always to Israel - both North and South. A true prophet refused to acknowledge the Schism. It could be naught else but sin!

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CONCEPTS OF LOVE AND LAW IN THE EIGHTH CENTURY PROPHETS

"When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron, and said to him, "Up, make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him" (Exod. 32:1).

From the outset Israel demonstrated her rebellious nature and the fact that she would be unfaithful to the Sinai Covenant. For some four centuries, from their entry into the land of Canaan about 1250 B.C. until the time of the usurper Jehu in the ninth century, a creeping syncretism had resulted in the covenantal faith in Yahweh becoming little more than a pagan Baalism. The Yahweh faith was revived in the prophet Elijah. He set in motion the forces that were to overthrow the Omri dynasty. With the help of Elijah's successor, Elisha, Jehu carried out a bloody purge of Israel. His revolutionary tactics carried into the Southern Kingdom, Judah, resulting in the eventual accession to the throne there of Joash, a member of the Davidic line who won moderate praise from the Deuteronomic historian as a reformer (II Kings 12:1-3).¹ Outwardly at least the forces of Baalism were thus defeated.

Following this outburst of religious reform there was a half-century of political turmoil and religious indifference in both Israel and Judah. In 805 B.C. Assyria attacked Syria crippling the latter but dissipating her own expansive powers in the process to the advantage of Israel. For fifty years

1. Anderson, op.cit., pp.217-20

Israel did not have to fear an invasion from beyond the Euphrates. Jehoash of Israel thus gained the most favorable political position the Northern Kingdom had ever enjoyed. His only trouble came from Judah, whose king, Amaziah, sought to "get even" for Jehu's activities in the previous generation. But he was soundly beaten and reduced to a state of vassalage. The way was paved for the glorious era of Jeroboam II, the greatest king of the Jehu dynasty.

The Deuteronomic historian says little about the reign of Jeroboam II dismissing him in a scant seven verses (II Kings 14:23-29). His contemporary in Judah, Uzziah, fares little better although we do know that the Southern Kingdom experienced a national revival (II Chron. 26) similar to that in Israel. It was a time of great material prosperity in both kingdoms. But there were fatal flaws in the social and religious fabric of society. The price of material prosperity was high. An oppressive two-level society grew up. The royal courtiers and the merchant class were in one strata at the top. The great mass of the people were ground into poverty in the lower reaches of this unjust society. There was little or no communication between these two levels of social existence. Baalism had been too deeply rooted to be wiped out completely even by measures as drastic as those of Jehu. Though the Yahweh faith was not dead, in the popular religion of the eighth century it had been so twisted as to scarcely resemble the faith of the Sinai Covenant.

It was clearly a time of crisis in spite of the fact that most of the people did not recognize it as such. As has

happened on numerous occasions like this, God raised up men to encounter the problem of religious apathy. Though it was a time of false security for the upper strata of Israelite society it was a time of suffering for the masses.

"... one might make bold to say that all of Israel's great religious advances came out of times of stress and suffering and pain, from the sojourn in Egypt to the struggles of the Maccabees. Pain is the great stimulator of religious experience."²

In the eighth century before Christ, such a time of stress and suffering, God's Word came in great power and force in the lives of four men: Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah. As most Old Testament prophecy is anonymous we can surmise that there were many prophetic voices of considerable influence at this time. However, a survey of the work of these men will give us a reasonable understanding of the relationship of Love and Law in the faith of Israel eight hundred years before Christ. Because of their impact upon Israel and ultimately upon the history of the whole world this period is often referred to as the "Golden Age of Prophecy".

A brief word is needed to clarify what "prophet" really means as it was referred to in Hebrew. The most common word in Hebrew for "prophet" was nabhi' (נָבִי) which derived from an Accadian root nabu meaning "to call, to call out, to speak". It, therefore, means "speaker" or "spokesman", particularly for God. Hence the prophet was strictly not a "foreteller" as is popularly supposed, but rather a "forthteller" or "preacher".³

2. Quoted in Meek, op.cit., p.156 from American Journal of Semitic Languages, vol.XL, (1923), p.59

3. Ibid., pp.150-51

This was the meaning of "prophet" in English until after the time of Queen Elizabeth I when for some reason the term came to mean foretelling or predicting. The strict meaning in English as in the original Hebrew is "speaker, spokesman". Proof of this is found in Exodus 7:1, where Yahweh says to Moses: "See, I make you a god to Pharoah, and your brother Aaron shall serve as your spokesman (your nabhi' - נָבִיא)."⁴

The first two prophets of the eighth century to be discussed are Amos and Hosea. They both were spokesmen for God in the Northern Kingdom although Amos came from the south. They were aware of the crimes against the poor and of the prostitution of the Yahweh-faith. Amos spoke of economic tyrants, with the sanction of corrupt courts, selling "the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes" (Amos 2:6; 5:10-13). Hosea, younger contemporary of Amos, poured scorn on the Baal festivals (Hosea 2:13), the practice of temple prostitution (4:14), sacrifice at the high places (4:13) and the worship of images in the form of bulls (13:1-2). The overriding concern of all the prophets was Israel's unfaithfulness to the Sinai Covenant with God. Each of them saw different aspects of the breach and in so doing deepened the understanding of the nature of the covenant relationship.

Amos

Amos was a Judean from Tekoa, a small village five miles

4. This is translated "prophet" in both the RSV and the KJV but as "spokesman" in The Complete Bible, "An American Translation" p.56 and in the Catholic Knox version, p.53.

south of Bethlehem and not far from Jerusalem. He was a shepherd who went to Bethel, the royal sanctuary of the rival country Israel, to proclaim his message. All his condemnations were of Ephraim-Israel with but two questionable exceptions. In both 6:1 ("Woe to those who are at ease in Zion") and 2:4-5, where he includes Judah in the list of nations being condemned for their transgressions there is doubt that Amos was the writer. In 6:1 the introduction of "Zion" is alien to the context and in 2:4-5 the charges against Judah are vague when compared with the detailed charges against other peoples.⁵ The time of his activity was in the latter part of Jeroboam II's reign and while Uzziah was on the throne of Judah.

Under Jeroboam the Northern Kingdom was in the midst of what would be its last period of prosperity. The social makeup of the nation had changed drastically with the upsurge of a powerful upper class and, across a wide gulf, the subjugation of the downtrodden masses. There was a false sense of security fostered in part by a gross misunderstanding of the Yahweh faith.

The general sense of optimism was encouraged by the religion of the time for:

"Men felt themselves to be favored worshipers of a very powerful God, able and propitious, and they were zealous in their worship of this obliging deity ... In praising him they praised themselves; in giving him his due of sacrifice they assured themselves the continuance of his services."⁶

5. Snaith, op.cit., pp.115-16

6. Hughell Fosbroke, "Introduction and Exegesis of Amos", I.B., vol.6, p.764

Amos must surely have wondered as he moved among these scenes of assurance and prosperity. For the God he knew was in no way such an accommodating idol. Rather He was Yahweh the great awe-inspiring deity of Israel's desert days manifested in the destructive phenomena of nature: storm, thunder and earthquake.

Furthermore, the Sinai Covenant was proof that He was not simply a God of power but supremely a God of righteousness. This righteous nature destroyed all iniquity and demanded the complete surrender of men. God's claim on man's obedience was absolute. Israel's special calling as the Chosen People of God, said Amos, did not entitle her to special privilege but called her to greater responsibility.

Amos' understanding of Israel's election was thus diametrically opposed to the popular conception of the day. In the covenant Yahweh had bound Himself to Israel. They were the "people of Yahweh" and He was the "God of Israel". By the time of Amos the Israelites had come to say: "Yahweh has chosen us therefore He will give us prosperity, victory, and prestige among the nations." In the prosperous times of Jeroboam religion and nationalism went hand in hand and everyone looked forward to a great "Day of Yahweh" when He would vindicate His people and crown them with glory and honor. But, said Amos, because of their iniquity Israel would receive punishment. What is more, the punishment would be far greater than that of other peoples because they had abandoned their special calling. Rather than a day of "light" as expected, the "Day of Yahweh" would be one of calamity (Amos 5:18-20): "Is not the Day of Yahweh darkness and not light, and gloom with no bright-

ness in it?"

To think that the doctrine of election meant that God would serve Israel rather than Israel being called to serve God was a grave error.⁷ At one point Amos seems to reject the idea of Israel's election altogether:

"Are you not like the Ethiopians to me,
O people of Israel," says Yahweh.
"Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt,
and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians
from Kir?" (Amos 9:7)

Here the prophet repudiates Israel's notion that Yahweh is a national god. By implication He is seen as the God of all nations for He has brought the Philistines and Syrians to their homelands just like the Israelites. For God to show such favor to these peoples was a terrible shock to Israel. These peoples has been Israel's most hated enemies!

Like the desolate land from which he came, Amos preached a message that was stern and hard. He saw and proclaimed as it had never been seen or proclaimed before the transcendent power of the living God. Israel was brought face to face with the hard reality that injustice among men was nothing less than disregard for the divine will of God. In the unrelenting message of Amos and his harsh prediction of doom Israel came to know that only in terms of life lived on the highest ethical and moral plane could her responsibility be fulfilled in the covenant with God. No longer could Israel consider God as a private idol catering to her desires. This was the God of all peoples who had singled out Israel in the covenant relation-

7. Anderson, op.cit., p.232

ship because of His love. Through Israel God intended to show all men the nature of that love. Because Israel had turned away from her responsibility she faced utter destruction by God.

But the situation was not entirely without hope. Amos' message was hard and it predicted a tragic end for Israel if she persisted in her blind and obstinate course. Yet the divine purpose was not destruction. Yahweh was active in the midst of His people seeking their redemption and a "return" from their evil ways:

"Seek good, and not evil,
that you may live;
and so the Lord, the God of hosts,
will be with you,
as you have said." (Amos 5:14)

The purpose of Amos' preaching was to give men the opportunity for the reformation and reorientation of their lives. In spite of Israel's unfaithfulness God's steadfast love pledged in the covenant sought to give the chosen people a chance to repent. It was for Amos' younger contemporary, Hosea, to enlarge upon this aspect of God's relationship with Israel.

Hosea

Hosea was a northerner who spoke to his own people. Little is known about his background but the suggestion of Snaitch that his frequent references to Gilead may mean he came from that area seems reasonable.⁸ Amos, a southerner, spoke harshly to the people of the Northern Kingdom, a fact that can largely be attributed to the deep-seated enmity between the two

8. Snaitch, op.cit., p.111

kingdoms of the Hebrews. Hosea too was severe in his condemnation of the Israelites but there is a special tenderness about him that could be explained by the fact he was speaking to his own people. His activity started in the latter part of Jeroboam II's reign and continued at least through the time of the Syro-Ephraimitic War in 735-34 B.C. He may have perished in the fall of the Northern Kingdom.

The words of Hosea are not unlike those of Amos. He condemns the greed, selfishness and injustice of men just as fervently as the older man. Israel's record of sin was long, dating from immediately after their call by Yahweh in the wilderness. Hosea often sums up the situation by saying that a harlot-spirit has led the people astray:

"Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of harlotry is within them, and they know not the Lord."
(Hosea 5:4; cf. 4:12; 9:1)

From the perspective of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel it is Hosea that gives depth of meaning to the "chesedh" of God. Through the analogy of his own domestic experience Hosea gained a profound understanding of God's "steadfast love" for Israel. In spite of her adulteries, Hosea's love for his wife Gomer-bath-Diblaim remained strong and sure. He realized that God's love for Israel was at least as sure and strong as his love for his wayward wife.

An interpretation problem must be considered before proceeding with a discussion of the God-Israel relationship as reflected in Hosea's marriage. The question is: what was the nature of the marital experience on which the prophet based his

parable? Was his wife at first faithful and then an adulteress or was Hosea involved with two women? The trouble comes in interpreting chapters one and three. Are they a sequence of events with one woman, Gomer, or are they separate accounts of Hosea's relations with two women, or are they parallel accounts of the same events?

The first difficult verse is 1:2 where Hosea is commanded by Yahweh to marry "a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry". The theory that this is a proleptic use of the term "harlot" seems valid.

"When he married Gomer she was not yet a harlot, although--looking at the matter in retrospect--she was clearly destined to become one. Since in the prophetic view a divine purpose was discernible in all of life's experiences, Hosea insisted that all this had happened at Yahweh's command."⁹

If, as this theory suggests, Gomer was faithful for a season then ran off with her lovers the parallel with Israel is more obvious. Wooed by God in the wilderness the Hebrews were faithful for awhile but soon ran off with their "lovers", the Baals.

The second problem in the text is found in 3:1. Here the word "again" or "yet" is considered an editorial expansion inserted to make the third chapter a sequel to the first rather than a parallel narrative written in autobiographical as opposed to biographical terms.¹⁰ Even if this is denied the wording is ambiguous enough in most translations to raise the possibility of a second woman. Knox's refreshingly quaint translation cap-

9. Anderson, op.cit., p.242

10. John Mauchline, "Introduction and Exegesis of Hosea", I.B. vol.6, p.561

tures the idea exactly:

"The Lord's word came to me: To wife that will have gallants a-courting her, shew thyself a lover yet ..."¹¹

Monsignor Knox has deftly avoided ambiguity by rearranging the sentence. But the original word (*ty*) can indicate the continuance or repetition of an action so that we may translate the phrase: "Go on loving a woman."¹² Such a rendering clearly means reclaim your wife and thus parallels God's wish to redeem the harlot Israel.

And so we can see that Gomer represents Israel and Hosea God in the covenant relationship. She is at first faithful but soon turns to other lovers just as Israel turned away from God. The use of the marriage pact as a symbol of the God-Israel Covenant was a daring one for a true prophet of the Lord. The idea of the fertile divine marriage was one of the important elements, perhaps the most important, in the fertility cults of Canaan. Perhaps though, by using this illustration known by all, Hosea was trying to transform the central theme of the popular religion into a deeper meaning. For him faithfulness to the covenant and true knowledge of God were the only foundation for a genuine Israelitic faith.

In his own undiminished love for Gomer, in spite of her sin, Hosea gained an understanding of God's "steadfast love" for Israel. He did not deny the dire consequences that awaited

11. Knox Version, p.810

12. Mauchline, op.cit., p.594

Israel if she persisted in turning from God. The judgment upon Israel's unfaithfulness was not to be cancelled. In this regard the names of Hosea's three children were significant:

- i) Jezreel
- proclaims the fall of the House of Jehu by recalling the bloodshed at the town of this name whereby Jehu came to power (cf. II Kings 9:17-26; 10:1-11).
- ii) Not pitied
- divine punishment will fall on all, the people as well as the royal household.
- iii) Not my people
- declares that the covenant between the Lord and His people has been broken.

But in spite of this the dominant note of Hosea's message is God's determination to maintain His steadfast love for Israel. No matter how wayward she becomes this love of God is not destroyed or diminished. This attitude on the part of God appears throughout the Book of Hosea. In addition to the first three chapters, chapter eleven where Israel is portrayed as God's son is particularly poignant. It is here that the light of hope shines brightest as Hosea relates how God called out His child from Egypt, cared for him and healed his wounds. Yet Israel (Ephraim) was determined to turn away. Then comes God's anguished cry expressing His undying love:

"How can I give you up, O Ephraim!
How can I hand you over, O Israel!
... My heart recoils within me,
my compassion grows warm and tender." (Hosea 11:8)

The predicted destruction of Israel came in 721 B.C. when "Omri-Land", as Sargon II called it, was swallowed up by the Assyrian "juggerknaut". From this point the prophetic succession was continued in Judah where Isaiah had been active

since the time of Uzziah (circa 742) and Micah was soon to appear on the scene. Unlike Israel, where there was continual violence and intrigue among the factions seeking political power, in Judah a single dynasty, that of David, remained on the throne of Jerusalem throughout the whole period. The social order was relatively stable as well with a fairly smooth shift from the simple tribal society to the more complex economy of town life. This did not mean the Northern Kingdom had a monopoly on evil. There was plenty of evidence in the Southern Kingdom of Judah of rapacious landlords (Isa. 5:8-10; Mic. 2:1-2); of the rich exploiting the poor (Isa. 10:1-2; Mic. 3:1-4); and of a moral decay covered by a thin veneer of piety (Isa. 1:10-17). Into this environment came the two prophets of note in the Southern Kingdom of the eighth century. Micah, like Amos, was the voice of the downtrodden lower classes speaking out against the greed and complacency of the wealthy classes. Isaiah was the giant of eighth century prophecy who interpreted what Yahweh, the Sovereign of Israel and all the nations, was saying through the tense political events of the time.¹³

Micah

Micah was the second major prophet of importance in the Southern Kingdom during the eighth century. He was from the otherwise insignificant village of Moresheth, twenty-five miles northeast of Jerusalem. A man of humble background, Micah was a small town artisan - a skilled laborer in our terminology.

13. Anderson, op.cit., p.256

He was deeply sympathetic to the poor and was keenly aware of the injustices suffered by them at the hands of the upper classes.

The time of his activity was probably between 714 and 700 with most of it concentrated immediately before the dates 711 and 701 B.C. when the national situation was most critical.¹⁴ Both Micah and Isaiah faced critical political unrest and corruption in Judah. It was a question of life or death for Judah as a nation. In the face of this Micah was willing to give his life to the task of strengthening the moral fiber of the people. He was sensitive to the fact that no amount of sacrifice or empty worship would maintain the covenant with God. Though he never explicitly discussed the covenant relationship Micah summarizes in one verse the part man is to play in making the covenant a living reality:

"He has showed you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness¹⁵
and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

Isaiah

By way of introduction it is necessary to say that the Book of Isaiah is not entirely the work of the eighth century prophet of that name. Because our primary concern is not textual criticism we will confine ourselves to a detailed study of passages only if it will illuminate our particular interest,

14. Rolland Wdfe, "Introduction and Exegesis of Micah", I.B., vol.6, p.898

15. or "steadfast love" (T⁰11)

namely the covenantal relationship of God and Israel as seen through Isaiah's eyes. Suffice it to say that this examination will be confined to the writings found in chapters 1-11 and 28-32. Scholars are generally agreed that these two sections contain the work of Isaiah's long career. Furthermore each of these sections comes from a fairly well defined period in the prophet's ministry: 1-11, the early period of Isaiah, from the death of Uzziah to the time of the Syro-Israel alliance, about ten years (742-732 B.C.); 28-32, reflect the later period of his life, from the accession of King Hezekiah of Judah to the great crisis brought on by Sennacherib's invasion of Judah, some fourteen years (751-701 B.C.).¹⁶

The career of Isaiah thus spanned the most critical period in the history of the nation up to that point. There was a sense of satisfaction and complacency but beneath the surface all was not well. Not only was the international horizon ominous with impending doom, the situation in Judah, just as in Israel, was not healthy. The people worshipped God. But they looked upon Him as a national asset rather than as the Creator and Ruler of mankind and his destiny.

Not much is known about Isaiah's background but he was obviously a man of the city. There is evidence that he was a man who grew up in the privileged circles of Jerusalem for he was very familiar with the way of life among the ruling classes. One thing is certain from his writings, he was:

"... an aristocrat of the spirit. He moved like

16. Anderson, op.cit., p.258

a prince among men. He spoke with the dignity and moral authority which he knew befitted an ambassador of the Most High, and it is evident that he was a product of the finest culture of Judah."¹⁷

He was intimately acquainted with the Temple of Jerusalem and there is some reason to believe he was a priest. Only once did he associate priests with prophets and secular leaders in his denunciations (Isa. 28:7). Unlike Amos and Hosea, Isaiah was not greatly influenced by Israel's wilderness experiences. Though aware of the traditions he was silent on the Exodus and other great themes of Israel's sacred history.

It might be thought unnecessary to be concerned with Isaiah in a study such as this because of this seeming lack of interest in the Sinai Covenant and its importance in the life of Israel. But such is not the case for there are two contributions of Isaiah that are of great importance in the understanding of the God-Israel Covenant in the future. First there is his vivid realization of the exaltation of God in an ethical sense and his discovery of faith as quiet and active confidence in God's control of events. The Lord is both Israel's Lord and Defender (Isa. 14:24-27; 31:5). Thus it is that Isaiah says to the weak and fearful King of Judah, Ahaz:

"Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands ..." (Isa. 7:4)

Later he says as much to all men of Israel showing them the folly of their anxious contriving. It is God alone, the mighty and exalted one who will prevail. Man's task is but to give

17. R.B.Y. Scott, "Introduction and Exegesis of Isaiah, chap. 1-39", I.B., vol.5, p.162

himself up to God in complete trust:

"In returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your
strength." (Isa. 30:15)

Isaiah's efforts were continually thwarted by the stubborn resistance of a faithless generation. His words fell on deaf ears; the signs he pointed to were held up before blind eyes. In the face of such failure Isaiah separated himself from the people and withdrew into the prophetic circle. This prophetic remnant was to swear allegiance to God, trusting in Him and waiting expectantly for the fulfillment of His purpose in history. Herein is the second great contribution of Isaiah in terms of the covenantal relationship.

"A remnant will survive the judgment, and the inconspicuous minority will become the community which is to be the bearer of the word of God."¹⁸

Thus is introduced the concept of the saving remnant, no matter how small and insignificant. Not because of, but in spite of men, God will always provide Himself with an instrument whereby His purposes will be fulfilled. It is Israel's opportunity and responsibility to be God's instrument but it must recognize the necessity of complete surrender to His Will.

This and the concept that such surrender is demonstrated in one's daily life through just dealings with one's fellowmen summarize the contribution of the eighth century prophets. To fulfill both requirements it was necessary for men to comprehend that God came to them in love. His Law was that men

18. Muilenburg, op.cit., p.322

should obey Him and manifest their allegiance to Him through observing the just law of the Decalogue in their daily lives. Whether or not there was a written record of the law in the eighth century is a question that cannot be answered conclusively. But whether written or oral we do know that there was a body of religious teaching available to the people. It might seem strange to say the basic message of these prophets was God's love in the light of their harsh pronouncements. The basic reason for their harshness was the fact that the people knew what it was they were denying. In spite of this the note of hope shines through. It remained for the spiritual successor of the eighth century prophets, Jeremiah, to give that hope life.

CHAPTER FIVE

GOD'S PROMISE OF A NEW BEGINNING - JEREMIAH

The spiritual inheritor of the eighth century prophets was Jeremiah ben Hilkiyah of the town of Anathoth, a few miles northeast of Jerusalem. This was the town to which Abiathar, the priest of David, was banished by Solomon when the latter came to the throne (I Kings 2:26). Tradition has assumed that Jeremiah was descended from him but there is no concrete evidence to support this. It is possible Jeremiah was of a priestly family. If so, they could have been active either in the local shrine or as commuting priests of the Temple in Jerusalem.¹ Jeremiah's career as a prophet began with his call in 626 B.C.² when he was still a mere "lad" (Jer. 1:6) and continued through the death-throes of a crumbling Judah until the final fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. There were five basic landmarks in Jeremiah's life of importance in considering his tumultuous career lived in tumultuous times: (i) his call; (ii) the Deuteronomic Reformation carried out by Josiah; (iii) his challenge to Jehoiakim through the scroll of Baruch in 604; (iv) his policy and sufferings during the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 588-586; (v) his deportation to

1. James Hyatt, "Introduction and Exegesis of Jeremiah", I.B., vol.5, p.796

2. This is the traditional position as opposed to Hyatt's suggestion that 626 was actually the date of the prophet's birth. His suggestion that the call came in 609, after the Deuteronomic Reformation is difficult to accept in the light of Jeremiah's call for reform in 2:1-4:4. Even though he was not convinced that the Deuteronomic Reformation was of value many considered it to be he surely would have acknowledged it.

Egypt by some of his own countrymen.³ For our purposes the Temple Sermon of 609 will be substituted for the challenge of Jehoiakim which is important only for the study of the composition of the Book of Jeremiah. Also the exile is only of minor importance to our theological concern and so will not be discussed.

Before proceeding to an examination of Jeremiah's career it is necessary to outline the historical setting into which he came. The career of Isaiah was crowned with the successful prediction that Yahweh would save and preserve Jerusalem. The Assyrian monarch, Sennacherib, departed without laying siege to the city. The event made a deep impression on Judean memory and in popular thought led to the belief that God would spare Jerusalem under any circumstances. Such a belief was not shared by Isaiah for his message was based on a condition:

"If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land;
But if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be devoured by the sword." (Isa. 1:19-20)

But in spite of this the popular religion of the day maintained the delusion that God was always on Israel's side and would maintain them no matter how heinous their iniquity.

Hezekiah, the king of Judah at the end of Isaiah's life, died in 687 B.C. His successor, Manasseh, was later portrayed by the Deuteronomic historian (II Kings 21:9) as the arch-villain among the Davidic kings. What Jeroboam I

3. H. Wheeler Robinson, The Cross in the Old Testament, p.142

was to the Kingdom of Israel, Manasseh was to Judah. In spite of this the reign of Manasseh was an important link between the great eighth century prophets and the revival of prophecy at the end of the seventh century. Though it was soon to crumble, Assyria's power was at its zenith during the reign of Manasseh and he remained an Assyrian underling throughout. On the domestic scene this capitulation to Assyria resulted in a total acceptance of pagan religious practice. The admittance of pagan practices even extended to the Temple of Jerusalem, focal point of Hebrew faith. But there were still those who faithfully adhered to the Yahwist cult. A few years after Manasseh's death Jeremiah commended the Rechabites for their courage and fidelity (Jer. 35). It is probable, as Anderson suggests,⁴ that many of the anonymous prophecies scattered among the writings of the great prophets were composed during this era. Deep within the life of Judah there was a patient faith that rested in the assurance that Yahweh would restore the true faith when the time was ripe.

That time came after the death of Ashurbanipal in 633, and the resultant swift decline of Assyria as a world power. Josiah, who had come to the Judean throne in 640, was now in his late teens and was ready to take advantage of the political situation. He began to institute many reforms including religious changes that resulted in the purging of numerous syncretistic accretions to the Yahwist faith. It should be

4. Anderson, op.cit., p.296

remembered that initially these reforms came largely because of nationalistic motivation.

Shortly after Ashurbanipal's death the seventy-five year prophetic silence ended with Zephaniah's appearance. His "devastating message pierced the complacent atmosphere of Jerusalem like a trumpet blast."⁵ He saw catastrophe fast approaching and spoke with a sense of urgency: "The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast." (Zeph. 1:14). The theme of a remnant, cleansed and renewed by God, is promised:

"For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord." (Zeph. 3:12)

Overlapping the career of Zephaniah was that of Jeremiah who first heard God's call in 626 B.C., the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign. Yahweh's word was not to be denied even though the prophet, like Moses, did not relish the thought of accepting the call. He shrank from the task using his youth as an excuse but God was not to be denied. Jeremiah felt God's hand upon his mouth, not to cleanse as with Isaiah, but to empower him to speak:

"Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.
See, I have set you this day over nations
and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to break down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant." (Jer. 1:9; 10)

The immediate occasion of Jeremiah's call was the ominous threat from the north. Throughout his life the threat of de-

5. Ibid., p.298

struction was always basic to his pronouncements. But God's promise "to build and plant" was also of primary importance in Jeremiah's message. He was the prophet of hope who expressed God's wish to cut a new covenant "on men's hearts".

Jeremiah's message, delivered between his call and the Deuteronomic Reformation a few years later, was strongly reminiscent of Hosea with its profound emphasis on the Mosaic tradition. Like his eighth century predecessor, Jeremiah speaks of the covenant as analogous to the marriage relationship. Israel was like a faithless wife who left her husband (Jer. 3:19-20). The Northern Kingdom had been divorced by God as witnessed by the tragic events of recent history. Judah was following the same treacherous course. But there was still time! Yahweh's purpose was to have his faithless people return to Him. Herein Jeremiah introduces the concept of a new covenant not exemplified by an outward decree but by an inner transformation of men's lives:

"Break up your fallow ground,
and sow not among thorns.
Circumcise yourselves to the Lord,
remove the foreskin of your hearts,
O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem."
(Jer. 4:3-4)

These words of the prophet were spoken at the time of the nationalistic reforms of the young King Josiah. In the midst of this reform activity (and probably during the purging of pagan practices and symbols in the Temple), a manuscript - "the book of the Torah" (II Kings 22:8) - was found and brought to the king. The effect of this discovery was dramatic. The king, upon hearing the contents of

the manuscript, tore his garments in despair for Judah's apostasy. He ordered the people to come to the Temple for a ceremony of Covenant Renewal.

This ceremony was followed by an energetic and thorough royal reform in the realm of religious practice. Although the recovery of Judah as a nation of strength and power was Josiah's primary aim, the complete destruction of all pagan practices and artifacts was to be commended. It is, therefore, probable that Jeremiah did support the reform in its initial stages as some scholars suggest.⁶ But there were some basic weaknesses in this, the Deuteronomic Reformation, that resulted in Jeremiah's turning against it. He soon saw that it did not produce the change of heart he had hoped for but rather a defiant nationalism and a shallow external piety. His fierce outburst against the Torah sounds like a man disillusioned by the reform he thought might achieve a genuine spiritual renewal of the covenant:

"How can you say, 'We are wise,
and the law of the Lord is with us'?
But, behold, the false pen of the scribes
has made it into a lie." (Jer. 8:8)

This was not to say the Deuteronomic Reform was entirely without value. It provided for a deepening of faith in Yahweh during chaotic times. Furthermore it revived concern for the Mosaic faith of the past and made a present reality of Moses speaking to the Israelite community:

"The present generation was actually there
when the covenant was made, just as a

6. Ibid., fn.16 on p.318

Christian, singing the well-known spiritual, can testify that he was 'there when they crucified my Lord.' (Deut. 5:2-3)
 ... the Mosaic past must come alive in the present if Israel is to have any future at all in the land that Yahweh has given."⁷

In the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy is the summary that was regarded by Jesus as the heart and core of the Law:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."
 (Deut. 6:4-5)

Such love was not to be for any sought-after reward but simply in response to the love Yahweh had first given so freely to His people.

But having said this it must be recognized that there were fatal flaws in the reform. It was these that turned Jeremiah, in his solitary perceptiveness, against the popular improvements in religion in spite of the beneficial aspects of the changes. The most obvious fault was the nationalistic basis of the reform mentioned above. At a deeper level was a fundamental theological flaw that may be summarized thus: obey Yahweh and all will go well, disobey Him and hardship will come. To be sure, such a result was not the aim of Deuteronomy but it was accepted largely on this basis and eventually led to a religious orthodoxy entirely based on this concept. Belief in divine reward and divine punishment had been a part of Israel's faith from the first. But as mentioned earlier,⁸ Isaiah, along with the other great pro-

7. Ibid., p.313

8. See above p.72

phets, constantly reminded the people of a subtle but most important qualification. This qualification was what Jeremiah referred to as the "circumcision of the foreskin of the heart" - the total redirection of Israel, both individually and collectively in obedience to God.

There was no reason for believing that concrete blessings of a material nature would not follow such faithfulness to the covenant. But by the same token there was no reason to think material reward would be an automatic result of such faithfulness. The danger, therefore, was twofold: (i) that prosperity was automatically considered the result of assumed righteousness; or (ii) that Israel would renew the covenant for the purpose of obtaining Yahweh's blessings. In either case the result was a codified "Law" to which one subscribed to gain God's grace. The problem came when the simple equation failed, when the man who obeyed the law received suffering and hardship rather than prosperity as his reward for faithfulness. The Book of Job wrestles with the resultant question of God's justice. It is a question still unanswered for many,⁹ but one which God Himself answers for the Christian in the cross of his Lord.

The seeming logic of the Deuteronomic Reformation was soon put to the test in the political arena. Josiah sought to consolidate his gains resulting from Assyria's sudden decline by allying himself with Babylonia. Just at this time

9. Archibald MacLeish, in his play "J.B.", succinctly states the question in modern terms:

"If God is God He is not good,
If God is good He is not God ..."

Egypt made a complete about face in her foreign policy and came to the aid of faltering Assyria, her former enemy. The probable reason for this was the opportunity to have Assyria form a buffer against the dangerous foes to the north. In any event Pharaoh Necho (609-593 B.C.) marched north encountering and soundly defeating Josiah at Megiddo. The Judean king was apparently executed for his conspiracy with Babylonia (609 B.C.) and Judah became a vassal of Egypt (II Kings 23:29-30). However, in 605 Necho was defeated by Babylonia's crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar II, at the Battle of Carchemish.

Thus the nationalistic dream of a Davidic Kingdom reuniting Israel and Judah was shattered. The heavy yoke of Assyrian oppression, only recently removed, now was replaced by the equally oppressive Babylonian yoke. The nationalistic motivation underlying the Deuteronomic Reformation was most evident. With scarcely a ripple of protest the revived Mosaic faith was forgotten or compromised again with the pagan ways of the world. It was in the midst of this tragic time when Israel had lost her identity as a nation that God spoke through Jeremiah.

For some time now Jeremiah had been silent, probably due to his disillusionment over the course the reform had taken.¹⁰ But now, following the death of Josiah, he returned

10. "... the silence of Jeremiah, which extended so many years between the reform and the death of Josiah is best understood as meaning that he did not wish, on the one hand, to oppose the action of the king, while, on the other hand, he was no longer able to approve of it." Buber, The Prophetic Faith. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949, p.168. However, it must be added

to the public arena. He was at last "full of the wrath of the Lord; ... weary of holding it in." (Jer. 6:11). Josiah's immediate successor was his son, Jehoahaz, who was removed by the Egyptians after three months in favor of a second son, Jehoiakim. This puppet of Egypt was the epitome of an oriental tyrant - cruel, selfish and indulgent. Under him the decline of Judah was steady and inevitable culminating in the Babylonian overthrow of the Egyptians in 602 B.C.

At the time of Jehoiakim's appointment to the throne by the Egyptians the people seemed oblivious to the dry rot that had set into both the social and religious structure of society. In the midst of this situation Jeremiah broke his long silence by making a bold public appeal in the Temple. Under Jehoiakim's leadership the paganism his father had sought to stamp out was rapidly being revived. Jeremiah burned with anger at the sight of such blasphemy in the Temple of the One True God. He began his message with a sharp summons:

"Hear the word of the Lord, all you men of Judah ...
Amend your ways and your doings, and I will
let you dwell in this place." (Jer. 7:2-3)

From here he went on to condemn the people in no uncertain terms. He charged them with deceit and hypocrisy worshipping Baal and then daring to stand before God saying: "We are delivered!" (7:8-10). Just as Jesus would do seven centuries later Jeremiah accused the people of turning the Temple into a "den of robbers" (7:11).

10. that the reason given here for the prophet's silence is only conjecture on the part of scholars.

There was only one possible answer in the face of this stubborn recalcitrance on the part of Judah: catastrophe and doom. Only in this way could the people be won back to God. He had sought them but they refused to listen to His prophets (6:10). They were blind to the fact that outward reliance on the institutions of the faith¹¹ was no substitute for commitment that was sparked from within. Jeremiah was profoundly aware of how difficult such an inward change would be for he knew that the heart itself often was the reason for a man's intransigence:

"The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately corrupt;
who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9)

Such predictions of impending doom seemed incredible to both the king and the people. They believed the alliance with Egypt was simply a temporary device protecting Judah from its northern enemies. Their attitude was bolstered by the false prophets of the king's court, professional lackeys who curried his favor and the popular acclaim of the people. Contrary to their simple solutions to the nation's problems Jeremiah's sermon and later his oracles, presented by his scribe Baruch, were harsh and cruel. He realized that:

"... Yahweh's word brings not peace, but a sword - the sword that cuts like a surgeon's knife to the seat of the malignant cancer and makes possible a deep inward healing."¹²

11. The Ark (Jer. 3:16); circumcision (4:4); the Law (8:8); sacrifice (7:21-26); even the Temple (7:4). Cf. Anderson, op.cit., p.333

12. Anderson, op.cit., p.332

The wrath stirred up by his Temple Sermon resulted in Jeremiah narrowly escaping with his life. Later when Baruch read the scroll of the prophet's oracles in the Temple, Jehoiakim demonstrated his contempt for Jeremiah by publicly burning his writings. But Jeremiah's predictions prevailed and in 597 B.C. Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin, who had only been on the throne for three months, was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar and carried into Babylonia along with the leading figures of Judah. Thus began the first chapter of the Babylonian Exile (II Kings 24:10-17).

Josiah's youngest son, Mattaniah, was now placed on the throne of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar who changed the boy's name to Zedekiah. He was a mild and benevolent contrast to his despotic brother, Jehoiakim. But he was also weak and vacillating resulting in the remaining princes in the land manipulating public policy to suit their own selfish interests.¹³ However, having been proved right by the course of events, Jeremiah reappeared and was often sought in counsel by the new king. It was at this time that he saw a vision which helped him realize that the hope of the Israelites lay in the Babylonian exiles. In a letter to the exiles he assured them that Yahweh had plans for them:

"When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you ... plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."
(Jer. 29:10-11)

13. Ibid., p.344

In spite of the exile and the wisdom of submitting to the Babylonians the forces of nationalism were still strong. Zedekiah was under terrific pressure to revolt, particularly after the accession of Necho's successor in Egypt, Psammetichus II. This was in 594 B.C. but Zedekiah did not join the conspiracy, perhaps in part because of Jeremiah's influence whose continual counsel was submission in spite of the strong opposition of the popular prophets:

"Do not listen to the words of your prophets ... 'Behold, the vessels of the Lord's house will now shortly be brought back from Babylon', for it is a lie which they are prophesying to you ... serve the king of Babylon and live. Why should this city become a desolation?" (Jer. 27:16-17)

Jeremiah's concern was not political even though his position was wise from a political point of view. He saw the exile as God's activity and, therefore, recognized opposition to Nebuchadnezzar as opposition to God.

However, to the people of Judah the prophet's message was either too subtle or too offensive.¹⁴ Finally in 588 B.C. with a new Egyptian pharaoh, Hophra, on the throne political unrest reached a fever pitch. This ruler revived the aggressive policy of Necho and the new hope resulted in revolt breaking out in Ammon and Judah. Nebuchadnezzar moved quickly and laid siege to Jerusalem. Throughout, Jeremiah maintained his position advocating surrender to Babylonia. But he was overruled. After the fall of the city he was carried into Egypt because of the animosity toward him and in spite of his pro-

14. Ibid., p.346

tests. A late tradition says he was stoned to death by his own countrymen after this move to Egypt.¹⁵

In evaluating Jeremiah from the perspective of our particular interest in the relationship of Love and Law as exemplified by the Covenant there are two things to be said. First there was his continual opposition to the assumption that the fulfilling of external cultic practices was all God required of men in upholding their side of the Covenant:

"He (Jeremiah) was to show that religion did not in the last resort mean the sacrifices of the altar, the worship of the temple, the covenant of the written law, but that it was a personal fellowship with God, to which all these were at the best mere accessories, and at the worst, delusive distractions."¹⁶

This realization of the individual fellowship with God was the most important contribution of Jeremiah to a true understanding of the covenant relationship. For him the hardness of heart must be removed from within a man before a right relationship with God could be achieved.

So too for the community. God was continually active in history tearing down and building up. The parable of the potter symbolized the dynamic working of God within the covenant constantly seeking to maintain a creative relationship with His people:

"And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he re-worked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do. Then the word of the Lord came to me: 'O house of Israel, can

15. Robinson, op.cit., p.150

16. Ibid., p.122

I not do with you as this potter has done?' says the Lord. 'Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.'" (Jer. 18:4-5)

No longer could Israel assume that God would uphold her no matter what she might do. In Jeremiah God was saying to Israel that she was to be the instrument of His activity. The Babylonian Exile was indicative of the suffering Israel was to face. It is to the lesson learned in suffering that we now direct our attention.

CHAPTER SIX

ISRAEL AS GOD'S "INSTRUMENT OF LOVE IN THE WORLD" - DEUTERO-ISAIAH

The next phase of the unfolding drama of the God-Israel Covenant took place in Babylonia among the exiles. Though given the opportunity to join them, Jeremiah had chosen to remain in Jerusalem where he was a witness to the final capture and destruction of the city. With the destruction of the city and the Temple Israel ceased to exist as a nation. Essentially the Covenant was dissolved because one party to it was no more! To many this symbolized the hollowness of the Yahwist cult and resulted in a more determined abandonment of Yahweh in favor of the heathen cults. The last we hear of Jeremiah is in Egypt as he condemns the worship of the Queen of Heaven, Ishtar. But the men of Judah are persistent in their apostasy:

"But we will do everything that we have vowed, burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out libations to her, as we did, ... in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then we had plenty of food and prospered, and saw no evil." (Jer. 44:17)

What a history of faith could be written from the perspective of those who continually combat the belief of men that only that religion which satisfies their personal desires is valid.

It is to the Babylonian Exile we must now turn. For it was here, in spite of continued apostasy much like that in Egypt at the time of Moses, that the lessons of God's activity in history were learned. In the prophecies of two men, Ezekiel¹ and Deutero-Isaiah, this new "wilderness" experience

1. It is unfortunate that much must be neglected in a survey

was understood as God's way of speaking to the hearts of His people Israel. The first named was a late contemporary and possibly a disciple of Jeremiah who accompanied King Jehoiachin in the exile of 597 B.C. Until the time of Jerusalem's fall his message was basically one of judgment. But from 586 on, after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, he became a prophet of hope, foreseeing in the vision of "The Valley of Dry Bones" (Ezek. 37) the restoration of Israel to the Holy Land. In summary:

"Jeremiah and Ezekiel belong together as Amos and Hosea do. They both plumb the deepest depths of Israel's faith and heritage, and together form a mighty witness to the meaning of the decline and fall of the nation in an international world."²

Through the experience of political and economic tragedy God was able to deepen Israel's religious understanding.

This new understanding of Israel's role in history was expressed in the words of a man who was probably Israel's greatest prophet. He was an anonymous writer about whom we know absolutely nothing regarding his life or the events of his personal career. Because his writings have been included in the Book of Isaiah this unknown prophet is referred to as Second or Deutero-Isaiah. This connection with the eighth century prophet is not accidental and as Buber suggests was probably due to this prophet's desire to be understood as one of the "disciples" or "apprentices" (limmudhim - תלמידים) of

1. such as this. For a discussion of this prophet-priest and of the "P" writings of the Exile period see Anderson, op. cit., chap.12 - "By the Waters of Babylon", pp.357-93.

2. Muilenburg, I.B., vol.1, p.330.

Isaiah:

"... he alone of all the prophets wished to be understood as a disciple, an expositor and continuer of a given message; and therefore he links the 'new things', or the 'coming things' the things designed for the redemption of the world, which only now are proclaimed by his mouth, with the 'former things' (41:22; 42:9; 48:3-6), which were prophesied by the mouth of Isaiah for the liberation of Israel as the beginning of the Messianic activity, and so the new things appear as the unfolding of those 'former things'."3

The prophecy of Deutero-Isaiah was, therefore, the culmination of what had been proclaimed for two centuries. But it was more than a finger-wagging "I told you so!" shouted in the face of a recalcitrant Israel. This prophet did not seek simply to demonstrate the proof of the teachings and warnings of former prophets. He sought to show Israel that in adversity God's hand could be seen. He was not only active in judgment but also as their Lord He was working to bring about their redemption. Thus Deutero-Isaiah revolves around two great themes: God's grace which comes even to Israel, the worst of sinners, and Israel's continuing role in the world as God's "instrument of love". The writer sees all history - past, present and future - as having meaning only in terms of God's purpose. This purpose is understood on the basis of Israel's sacred history and in the imminent eschaton.4

With this great concern for history Deutero-Isaiah became the originator of a theology of world history. Some have

3. Buber, The Prophetic Faith, p.204

4. Muilenburg, I.B., vol.1, p.334

seen him as the first monotheist of Israel. Rather than this he was the first to develop a monotheistic theology. True to his sensitivity to history it was out of the milieu of historical circumstance in which the Jews found themselves in Babylon that the prophet spoke concerning God's control of history. Undoubtedly many felt as they observed the Babylonian festivals in honor of their gods that Marduk must indeed be supreme. Historical proof could be found in the desolation of Israel and the victory of Babylonia. But God's purpose was not fulfilled simply in and through the actions of particular men. Temporal victory was proof of nothing.

"... in the words of Deutero-Isaiah, God at every stage stands over against the idols of the nations as He Who knows the coming things and announces them from the beginning whereas they, the idols of the nations, know nothing, and therefore are incapable of announcing anything."⁵

Before God the activity of men in defiance of, or in ignorance of Him, is mere sham. Not only does He announce history but He creates it as well. The profound concern of Isaiah that man's obstinancy stood in the way of God's activity had no meaning for Isaiah's disciple. What man does is on the surface of history. God's control plumbs the depths. God's creative force is continuous and utilizes a variety of ways and means in fulfilling His purposes.

Thus it was that Deutero-Isaiah saw Cyrus, the Persian emperor who was gathering strength on the eastern horizon, as the Lord's anointed (Isa. 45:1) who, though he may not have

5. Buber, op.cit., p.210

known it, had been called to fulfill God's Will. Throughout his message this prophet brought hope to Israel, the object of God's love and concern (Isa. 41:14). In the face of their despair he told the Israelites of the Lord's creative power:

"The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary,
his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases
strength." (Isa. 40:28-29)

He was also Israel's redeemer who would not forget them but would restore them:

"Fear not, for I am with you;
I will bring your offspring from the east,
and from the west I will gather you;
I will say to the north, Give up,
and to the south, Do not withhold;
bring my sons from afar
and my daughters from the end of the earth."
(Isa. 43:5-6)

Thus Deutero-Isaiah brought into focus four great themes of God's nature as universal categories that cannot be claimed exclusively to her advantage by Israel. God is Creator: of all things and continuously in and through all history. God is Redeemer: in the covenant is seen the unending redemption of Israel, but ultimately all nations are to be included in the covenant bond (Isa. 55). God is Sovereign: He is Lord of all and the Creator of history whom all men will eventually acknowledge (cf. 45:14f.; 49:8ff.).⁶

6. There is considerable difference of opinion regarding the "people" in these passages. Buber says they are all peoples of the earth while Muilenburg takes the more common position that the reference is to Israel. (cf. Buber, op.cit., pp.215-17 and Muilenburg, I.B., vol.5, pp.528-30 and pp.570-

Finally God is Elector: herein may be seen that which sets Israel apart. It is Israel that God has chosen not for special privilege but with the responsibility of "servant". God's relationship with mankind would not be with Israel alone. But through Israel as the Servant of God His redemption would come to all men.

"She is appointed to be God's witness, that men may know and believe and understand that he is the one God (43:10-12; 44:8)
... Through her all the nations of the world will be forgiven and redeemed. Through her the covenant will be mediated to all men. But above all, the servant is a vicarious sufferer for the transgressions of the nations."⁷

And yet God's elected servant is something (or someone) more than Israel. Considerable scholarly discussion has taken place in the attempt to determine whether the portrait of the "Suffering Servant" symbolizes an individual or Israel. Strong arguments can be given to support either position with the balance swinging in the direction of Israel. But the "paradox of the two servants", as Buber calls it, remains:

"It is intended to be a paradox. In it we recognize the supposition necessary in order that Isaiah's Messianic prophecy should be transformed into the Messianic mystery of Deutero-Isaiah."⁸

6. 73). There seems good reason to accept Buber's conclusion that: "Israel's comfort, with which the book began, (i.e. First Isaiah), here rises to be the comfort of humanity." This conclusion is arrived at in spite of the ambiguity of "the people" in the various passages on the strength of Deutero-Isaiah's overall concern to demonstrate the sovereignty of God over all nations. C. C. Torrey in his book The Second Isaiah supports this position. (cf. pp.116-17)

7. Muilenburg, I.B., vol.1, p.334

8. Buber, op.cit., p.223. This is an interesting statement by

Essentially the problem results from the fact that, as Muilenburg points out,⁹ Israel is present but there is more than Israel in the portrait. It is eschatological and, therefore, must be understood as speaking of the "then" or "will be" as well as the "now". There is an aura of mystery about the servant that no amount of exegetical research or scholarly theologizing can resolve.

Nor was this all there was to the mystery. Israel was, in Deutero-Isaiah's words, to "be exalted and lifted up" (Isa. 52:13). But her exaltation was to come through suffering, her victory was to be in terms of sorrow and grief. In common with earlier prophecy Deutero-Isaiah had nothing to say about the Sinai Covenant but looked to the Exodus as the decisive event of Israel's past (Isa. 43:16f.; 51:9f.). He looked for the new Exodus wherein God would again deliver Israel from Egypt, this time symbolically portrayed by the Babylonian Exile. But simple deliverance from captivity would mean only a lofty nationalism that would probably result in a repeat of past tragedy. Rather than this, the prophet saw that it was in Israel's mission as the Suffering Servant of God that she would

8. the Jewish philosopher. It is in the "Suffering Servant" passages of Deutero-Isaiah that the Christian faces the greatest temptation to "read" Christ back into the O.T. Robinson's word is valuable at this point: "The link with the N.T. for modern exegesis is not to be found in the anticipation of an individual sufferer so much as in the reality of the suffering, the attitude towards it, and the interpretation of its mystery. The true preparation made in the Old Testament for the New lies in the continuity of truth, not in the superficial resemblance of its particular manifestations.", op.cit., p.91

9. Muilenburg, I.B., Vol.1, p.334

be exalted and God's purposes would be fulfilled throughout the world.

"This was the deepest mystery of her (Israel's) calling. The mystery is illumined by the figure of the Servant who, unlike Cyrus or any great nation, would tread a path leading through defeat to victory."¹⁰

Israel had to learn the profound lesson Jesus would pass on to his disciples six centuries later:

"He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."
(Matt. 23:11-12)

"Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it."
(Luke 17:33)

Herein may be seen the eschatological nature of the New Covenant with God. Deutero-Isaiah sees in the Sinai Covenant only a pattern for what is to be and he tells Israel that the living relationship with God must be forged in such a way that the goal of her existence must be in a future guaranteed by the Divine Promise alone. Rather than being a description of the past and a model for the present, Sinai has become "a description of the great good lying in the future."

"This projecting of a central element of Israelite religion into the 'Not yet' cuts away the ground from under the feet of pious souls in their attempts to 'make themselves tabernacles' and rest in some stage that earthly history has already attained."¹¹

The challenge thus posed is perilous at best, terrifying if comprehended in its fullness. What Israel is being asked

10. Anderson, op.cit., p.422

11. Eichrodt, op.cit., p.63

to do is what God has sought her to do from the outset: give an unqualified "Yes!" to His love and in so doing renounce all claims to the determination of her own destiny. What this will mean in terms of suffering is, for the first time, outlined by Deutero-Isaiah. Her submission must be in complete trust and with the realization that a suffering service will be her "allotted portion of the world's treasure".

Is it any wonder then that Israel chose to ignore her prophets for the most part and sought to "rest in some stage that earthly history has already attained", that is, endeavored to raise to the status of Law the law founded on the remembrance of times past. In a word this was (and is) legalism. In the aftermath of the Exile when the restoration of Jerusalem was coupled with the dispersion of the Jews (the Diaspora) into every corner of the known world it was such a reactionary trend that prevailed. It is always easier to institutionalize (strait-jacket) an idea than it is to let the idea transform, and go on transforming, the human mind. "The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE VICTORY OF ORTHODOX LEGALISM OVER THE LIVING COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIP-EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

The Christian, taking as his example Jesus' uncompromising condemnation of the hypocrisy and false piety of the Pharisees, looks with distaste and scorn at anything branded by the term "legalism". For this reason the work of Nehemiah and Ezra has often been ignored, or at best glossed over, as of little importance. However, scholars today are realizing that in spite of the justified arguments against Judaism's particularism and legalism there is much in the work of Ezra and Nehemiah for which Christianity can be thankful. They sought to implement the prophets' pronouncements against the menace of Samaritan and other foreign religious influences. In the process they literally saved Israel from almost certain extinction as a people.

"Judaism lost much of cultural benefit ... by the rigid rejection of all foreign influences, but the cost was counted worthwhile when the purity of its religion and the identity of its people were maintained. The real test of the value of the policy of exclusion came with the onset of the Hellenistic Age ... some Jews accepted Hellenism and revelled in their new freedom but it was such conservative and exclusivistic groups as the Hasidim that preserved Judaism and led the way toward Christianity."¹

It is true, as it was with the Pharisee in Jesus' day or would be with a full fledged Puritan today, that extreme moralists are at times anachronisms and seem more hindrance than help to God's cause. But it is also true that there have been many instances when such "spiritual gadflies" have been the main in-

1. Raymond Bowman, "Introduction and Exegesis of Ezra and Nehemiah", I.B., vol.3, p.566

struments of God's purpose.

To understand the work of Nehemiah and Ezra it is necessary to begin with an examination of the historical setting into which they came. As we have seen,² Cyrus was looked upon by Deutero-Isaiah as the Lord's anointed, called to fulfill His purposes. In 539 B.C. Babylonia fell before the Persian king who abandoned the "scorched earth" policies of the Assyrians and Babylonians. He allowed his subject peoples to carry on their customs, worship their gods, and return to their homelands.

Thus in 538 Cyrus proclaimed an edict of liberation for the Jewish exiles (Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5). They were allowed to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the Temple. To lead the Jewish return Cyrus appointed Sheshbazzar, a son of Jehoiachin (5:14). He was not a leader of any consequence but he was in the Davidic line which was of considerable importance to many of the Jews.

"It must have appeared that the New Age, in the dawn of which Second Isaiah stood, was about to break into the full light of day."³

But such was not to be the case for the eschatological vision of the Servant exalted through suffering was too lofty to be fulfilled in the temporal history of God's Chosen People. What actually happened would seem, at first glance, to be a complete denial of the magnificent, world-encompassing word of the unknown prophet of the Exile. Three events resulted in the de-

2. See above, p.89-90

3. Anderson, op.cit., p.433

velopment of Judaism, the name given to the religion of Israel's post-exilic days. These event were: (i) the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem under Zerubbabel; (ii) the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah; (iii) the renewal of the covenant under the priest Ezra. Judaism was the result with the Law becoming primary in the faith of the Jews:

"... (Judaism's) genius has been found to lie in the punctilious observance of the ritual of the cultus and the minutiae of the Law ... To the Jew, with his profound veneration for the Pentateuch, the Law has seemed to tower high above the Prophets ..."⁴

It is for this reason that the Babylonian Exile has been looked upon as the great watershed of Israelite history and religion.

Little need be said here about the reconstruction of the Temple. The return to Jerusalem took place over a long period and it is probable that the number of those "whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord" (Ezra 1:5) was small. Work was started by this group but there was considerable trouble with "the people of the land" (4:4-5) so the job was halted. Eighteen years went by before Zerubbabel again resumed the work in 520 B.C. This time the Temple was completed, largely due to the inspiration of two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, according to Ezra (5:1).

Moving on to the work of Nehemiah it is necessary to pause briefly and discuss a pertinent literary problem. The two books, Ezra and Nehemiah, were written as part of a larger work which included the books now designated as I and II Chroni-

4. H. H. Rowley, The Rediscovery of the Old Testament, p.114

cles. There is some discussion about the authorship of these works but most scholars agree that basically they are the work of one anonymous writer known only as the Chronicler. The work is essentially a reinterpretation of Israel's history in terms of the Chronicler's central conviction:

"Israel was called to be a church, a worshipping community. In a broad sense, Israel was to be 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' ... a people whose whole life was to be a 'liturgy' or divine service. But in a special sense the community was to have its center in the Temple ..."⁵

In the second half of the Chronicler's work, Ezra-Nehe-miah, there are a number of literary problems. Not the least of these is the chaotic order of the narrative which mixes the story of Ezra with that of Nehemiah. It would seem that this has resulted from extensive editing on the part of later scribes. Stemming from this is the whole question of priority, the only literary question of real concern for this particular study. Because the Book of Nehemiah was affixed to the Book of Ezra it has been traditionally assumed that the politician followed the priest. However, there is considerable evidence proving that the opposite was the case.⁶ Whether or not they were contemporaries is another matter open to conjecture. At best it would seem that their careers overlapped briefly about 400 B.C. It is probable though that the chronological order is as follows:

- Nehemiah during the reign of Artaxerxes I
(464-423 B.C.)

5. Anderson, op.cit., p.437

6. Cf. Bowman, op.cit., pp.562-63

- Ezra about a generation later under Artaxerxes II (404-358 B.C.)

Within the books themselves it is difficult to separate fact from fiction because of the Chronicler's approach to history. This is, however, the only record we have of the Jews during the Persian period of supremacy. It is only half complete with a great gap of some three generations between the completion of the Temple in 515 B.C. and Nehemiah's appearance in Jerusalem about 445 B.C. During this period Persian culture reached its zenith. As for the Jews in this span we know very little. Nonetheless:

"The story of Ezra-Nehemiah for the most part rings true. It makes good sense when understood from the standpoint of what is known otherwise of the history of the Jews during the exilic and post-exilic periods ... and of the history and culture of the world in which the Jews then lived ..."⁷

The prophet Ezekiel is referred to as the "Father of Judaism" because of his outline of "a theocratic community, a temple-centered society".⁸ The fulfilment of this dream and the establishment of Judaism came with the work of Nehemiah and Ezra. In spite of the lack of historical record for the period preceding Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem we do know something of the situation at this time. Though dates are rather uncertain it is probable that the prophets Obadiah,

7. Ibid., pp.565-66

8. Rowley, op.cit., p.115, (cf. Herbert G. May, "Introduction and Exegesis of Ezekiel", I.B., vol.6. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956, p.62). It is probably better to call him the "Grandfather" and Ezra the "Father of Judaism"!

Malachi and Joel were active in this period. Their books present the picture of a struggling Jewish community, threatened from without by hostile neighbors and weakened from within by poverty, discontent and religious apathy.⁹

Nehemiah, a Hebrew cup-bearer to Artaxerxes I, heard a report of the dismal conditions in Jerusalem (Neh. 1:3). He was very much disturbed by what he heard and persuaded the king to send him to Jerusalem with the rank of governor. After inspecting the ruins of the city he roused the people to rebuild the walls as the first step in defending it from the surrounding hostile peoples (Neh. 2:17-18). In spite of opposition the job was completed in fifty-two days (6:15) and the walls were dedicated amid scenes of joy and thanksgiving (12:27).

The opposition was particularly strong from the outside. Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, claimed the Jewish territory on the basis of its former assignment to Samaria by the Babylonians as "The Province Beyond the River". In addition the Ammonites and Edomites, to the east and south respectively, accused the Jews of plotting revolution against Persia and threatened to attack them. Under these pressures and because of the easy-going attitude of many of the Jews themselves toward their neighbors, Nehemiah introduced a series of stringent reforms aimed at making the Jewish people into a secure and closely regulated community. This he did by enforcing two standards: proof of Jewish birth and loyalty to the Torah coupled with faithful support of the Temple. In essence he

9. Anderson, op.cit., p.450

was establishing a theocracy founded upon the principles of the Priestly Code.

After the walls were completed Nehemiah enrolled all the citizens according to genealogy (Neh. 7:5-69). By implication this meant a person had to be born into the right family and able to trace his background to a genuine Jewish ancestor. Later he was to ban intermarriage on the basis of Deuteronomic Law (Neh. 13; cf. Deut. 23:3ff.). Still later Ezra not only denounced intermarriage but went so far as to forcibly break up any marriages with foreigners which had already taken place (Ezra 10:2-5). This narrow exclusiveness was mildly protested in a story written at this time that is one of the most beautiful in the Old Testament, the Book of Ruth. Here a Moabite woman is portrayed as an ancestress of David thus refuting the assumption that genealogy is a proper criteria for determining a person's worth in the Jewish community.

In enforcing the second requirement Nehemiah demanded strict observance of the Sabbath. He organized regular worship in the Temple and provided for the priesthood through a mandatory tithe. The fear of syncretism had been with Israel ever since their first occupation of Canaan. It is probably true that the reforms under Hezekiah and Josiah ultimately failed because of an inability to cope with this problem. Whatever may be said about the narrowness of the reforms of Nehemiah and Ezra, their success was largely due to solving this difficulty. As has been mentioned before, the real value of their work came a century later with the rise of Alexander the Great and his attempt to absorb all religious and cultural

differences into the synthesis known as Hellenism.

"The mystery is that Israel resisted assimilation, and creatively transformed what was borrowed from others into a vehicle for expressing her own faith. Israel's calling was not to be 'like the nations' eventually to be swallowed up in whatever empire ruled the earth, but to be a 'peculiar' people, set apart from the nations."¹⁰

Some years after Nehemiah's work in Jerusalem Ezra appeared as the leader of a caravan of exiles returning to Palestine from Babylonia.¹¹ He came with Persian permission not as a governor but to investigate religious matters in Jerusalem. He was described as:

"... a scribe skilled in the law of Moses which the Lord the God of Israel had given."
(Ezra 7:6)

"... the priest, the scribe of (i.e. learned in) the law of the God of heaven" (Ezra 7:2)

It would seem that Ezra sought to build on the work of his predecessors, particularly Nehemiah. Even so the latter is never mentioned in the Ezra Memoirs. However, at one point Ezra gives thanks to God that the Temple and walls had already been rebuilt (Ezra 9:9).

At a public gathering in Jerusalem Ezra read from "the book of the Law of Moses" (Neh. 8:1) because of the people's concern. There were Levites with him to interpret the Law "so that the people understood the reading" (Neh. 8:8). This was

10. Ibid., p.453

11. The usual order of the Ezra story is considered to be: Ezra 7:1-8:36; Neh. 7:73b-8:18; Ezra 9:1-10:44; Neh. 9:1-10:40. (cf. Bowman, op.cit., p.560)

continued on various occasions and culminated in a confession of sin by the people, separation from foreigners and the making of a covenant (Neh. 9). There is a remarkable parallel here with the earlier covenant ceremony at the time of Josiah (II Kings 23:1-3) or at Sinai/Horeb. In essence this ceremony led by Ezra, as with the one under Josiah, was based on an ancient tradition of periodic covenant renewal. There is considerable discussion as to what this "Law of Moses" was but the most feasible answer is the Pentateuch.¹²

What was unique about the covenant at the time of Ezra was the particular historical circumstances of the ceremony. As before the people covenanted (or pledged themselves) to keep the Law of God. But coming as it did in the wake of Nehemiah's particularistic policies and seemingly with a concern for equally stringent measures regarding spiritual matters, the interpretation of the meaning of Law was somewhat different from what it had been before. Throughout her history Israel had continually faced the problem of allowing the Law to become an end in itself. She constantly had to guard against the tendency of allowing adherence to the letter of the Law to supersede a living relationship to God who stood behind or over rather than within the Law. In the immediate results of Ezra's work these fears were justified.

Complicating our consideration of Ezra's objective in imposing the Law upon the community are two factors. First

12. Anderson, op.cit., pp.455-56. At the very least, it must have been the "P" stratum.

the fact that he was a priest gives weight to the argument that he was primarily concerned about consolidating the position of the priesthood in post-exilic Israel, especially in the face of the Samaritan Schism. The monarchy disappeared in the post-exilic period leaving the way clear for the unchallenged supremacy of the priesthood. Secondly, because "legalism" - the strict conformity to the letter of the Law - was in fact the result of Ezra's efforts, his initial objective, whatever it was, seems irrelevant. There is, however, considerable validity in the position taken by many scholars who say that Ezra's primary goal was the fulfilment of the prophetic dream of a people genuinely committed to God in unquestioning allegiance to Him. Such a subordination of the people, individually and collectively, was seen to be manifested in a devout allegiance to the Law.

This would appear, at first glance, to be an exalted aim. But in actual fact the narrow, ingrown religious body that developed would seem to bear out the conclusion of other scholars that Ezra's interest was primarily that of the priest.¹³ Where the prophet saw fulfilment beyond history the priest, as exemplified by Ezra, saw the possibility of fulfilment within history. Because of man's mortality and resultant finiteness it is possible to accept the prophet over the priest, but in

13. Eichrodt, op.cit., pp.428-33 gives an excellent discussion of this priestly victory over prophetic eschatology. At one point (p.430) he says: "It was not, therefore, a course of action conditioned by his period, but one rooted in the very structure of priestly piety, when Ezra consciously made it his life's work to achieve the elimination of prophetism and its great futuristic hope."

so doing one must always be aware of the antinomian tendencies that can result. Coupled with faith nurtured by a living hope there must always be concrete guidelines by which the believing man determines his daily actions. These the priest offered to the Jew, but again with a pitfall, in this instance "legalism".

Since Paul Christians have been suspicious of legalism and, therefore, have looked upon Judaism with a wary eye (except for right and left extremes of sectarian Christianity). Justification by faith has been a watchword of the faith (Rom. 3:23). But even for Paul faith was impossible without works. The justified man had received the Spirit and where the Spirit was given, the fruits of the Spirit must appear.¹⁴ The man of faith then is faced with the continual task of balancing Law and Grace (Love). In so doing he is constantly reminded of the hypocrisy and emptiness that usually results from too rigid a concern for the letter of the Law as opposed to the anarchy that can result from too great a reliance upon God's Grace or Love.

Even so we must acknowledge a real debt the Christian faith owes to Judaism and its founders in post-exilic Palestine. Jewish law met the problem of the average man in every age beset with the questions: "How far can I go and still be righteous?" or "What must I do to be saved?" In spite of the possibilities of error we have already discussed, Judaism did

14. B. H. Throckmorton, "Antinomianism", I.D.B., vol.A-D. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962, pp.143-4

supply a specific code of conduct whereby men could fulfill the Will of God. Of more importance to Christianity was the fact that it protected the heritage of Israel from the very real threat of total extinction thus fulfilling God's purpose as the guardians of His work in the world until "the fullness of time".

Before outlining the course of Judaism until the time of Christ in the next chapter, a resume of the positive aspects of the post-exilic faith should be given:¹⁵

- i) Though there is greater emphasis in Priestly Law on ritual than on ethical demand, the concern for seemingly "trivial technical offences" was inspired by a high ethical sense which realized anything, regardless of how trivial, was to be abhorred if it was contrary to the Will of God.
- ii) The Law did not teach that there was hope of forgiveness for the man who sinned deliberately. Real repentance was called for. In the Mishnah we read "If a man said, 'I will sin and repent, and sin again and repent', he will be given no chance to repent. (If he said,) 'I will sin and the Day of Atonement will effect atonement' then the Day of Atonement effects no atonement." (Yoma 8:9)¹⁶
- iii) The fact that the prophetic books were compiled during the post-exilic age illustrates the high esteem given the prophets by the Judaizers. This also would seem to negate the assumption of many that there were two distinct groups in Judaism maintaining the interest of the prophets on the one hand and of the priests on the other.
- iv) "... Judaism was more profoundly spiritual than is often supposed ...". In establishing strict

15. This is a synopsis of the arguments presented by H. H. Rowley in The Rediscovery of the Old Testament, chap.7. All quotations are taken from this source unless otherwise noted.

16. The Mishnah. trans. by H. Danby, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933, p.172

observance of the Law the leaders of Judaism sought to make it the organ of the spirit the prophets had called for while protecting it from the contamination of outside influences which had been the constant problem in the past.

- v) Though the actual time and place is not known the origin of the synagogue took place in post-exilic Judaism. Here again is a refutation of the belief that Judaism was preoccupied with ritual and empty form. Because there was no altar of sacrifice or elaborate cultic rites the worship of the synagogue was simple and purely spiritual in nature. The synagogue's value as an educational institution is also worthy of mention.
- vi) The Canon of the Old Testament was gathered by Judaism. The present form of many of these books was determined during the post-exilic period. "This was not the achievement of a spiritually decadent age, which is to be contrasted with the splendid heights of the great prophetic days as obsessed with pernickety ritual matters and blind to great moral and spiritual issues." (p.125)
- vii) This period also produced most of the Psalms and much of what is classified as the Wisdom Literature. In this latter category the Book of Job ranks as one of the most eloquent diatribes against the whole approach to life and faith personified by cultic Judaism.

Having recited these positive aspects of Judaism we must still remember that the approach of Ezra, Nehemiah and their successors led to a narrowness from which Judaism has never recovered. Gradually the law acquired an ever-increasing independent importance until in rabbinic Judaism it attained the status of necessary mediator between man and God.

"From being a nation tied to the law Israel becomes a religious community gathered around the law. To keep the law becomes the distinctive mark for membership of God's people."¹⁷

The importance of the law gave rise to a new profession, the interpreters of the law called the scribes (Ezra 7:10). In terms of the cultus it became increasingly important that the divine worship conform with the law. Such conformity eventually gave the service its whole meaning, not just justification for its use as had originally been the case.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AFTER EZRA-NEHEMIAH AND BEFORE CHRIST

To understand the circumstance of Judaism at the time of Christ and of the Apostle Paul we shall describe briefly the developments from the time of Ezra, about 375 B.C., until Jesus' ministry in the second and third decades of the Christian era. Historically the period following Ezra is one for which we have little or no record. Not until I Maccabees, a book of the Apocrypha which deals with events of the second century B.C. (175-132 B.C.) do we have any conclusive record of the historical situation for Judaism at this time. Although certain writings, in the wisdom and apocalyptic categories particularly, point to tensions within Judaism, externally the situation would seem to have been fairly quiet.

The reforms instituted by Ezra and Nehemiah resulted in Judaism becoming a relatively closed system which guarded itself closely from outside encroachment. But there were currents of unrest and dissatisfaction with the prevailing exclusivism.

"... wisdom teachers were reflecting on the meaning of life in an atmosphere of thought that was more international than Israelite."¹

Reference has already been made to the Book of Ruth with its protest against the racial exclusivism of Judaism and to the Book of Job's eloquent plea against the narrow understanding of good and evil portrayed in the "Deuteronomic equation". In the Book of Jonah the belief in Israel's mission as God's instrument in the world carrying His message to "Nineveh" is reiterated in a

1. Anderson, op.cit., p.503

clever allegorical form. Later we will discuss at some length the culmination of theological development in this period as it is illustrated by the apocalyptic Book of Daniel.

Finally the stability and peace of the Persian Empire ended with the rise to power of the Macedonian military genius, Alexander the Great (336-323 B.C.). Once again Palestine became a pawn in the hands of aspiring empire builders. At first the change was of little consequence but the early death of Alexander and the resultant division of his empire between his generals brought Palestine back to the age-old struggle between the powers of the Fertile Crescent. Mesopotamia and Syria went to Seleucus, Egypt came under the rule of Ptolemy. These leaders and their successors continued Alexander's policy of cultural integration referred to as "Hellenization".²

Initially Hellenism was not considered a serious threat to the Jewish faith. The dispersion of the Jews (known as the Diaspora) which had taken place gradually during the supremacy of Persia meant that small colonies of them could be found scattered through most of the civilized world. A large group had settled in Egypt and, being receptive to foreign influences, embarked on the task of translating the scriptures into Greek. The result was that version of the Old Testament referred to as the Septuagint (LXX). After the partition of Alexander's empire Palestine came under the jurisdiction of the Ptolemies. These rulers were rather easy-going as compared with the Seleucids and did not force the Jews into cultural conformity. This

2. See above, pp. 96, 102, 103

liberal policy itself served the desired aim of cultural integration. Many Jews, particularly among the upper classes, were attracted to Hellenism.

However, as had been the case countless times in the past, there were many staunch defenders of the covenant faith. They saw in Hellenism the latest in a long line of syncretistic threats to Israel's relationship to the jealous God of the Covenant. The revival in this period was led by the Hasidim³ who came largely from rural and lower class backgrounds as opposed to the sophisticated city-dwelling Hellenizers. Because of the lack of active opposition from external sources to continued Jewish religious practice the internal struggle between the Hasidim and the "modernists" of Judaism remained hidden until the fall of the Ptolemaic regime in 198 B.C. In that year the Seleucid ruler, Antiochus III, defeated Ptolemy V and thus brought Palestine under his political control.

Antiochus was a vigorous supporter of Hellenism. Antiochus IV (175-163 B.C.), a successor of this first Seleucid ruler of Palestine, was an avid follower of his policies. So dedicated to the cultural merits of the Greeks was this ruler that he was called Antiochus Epiphanes because of his claim that he was a god, namely, Zeus manifest in the world (cf. I Mac. 1:10-15; II Mac. 4:7-17). Under him local religious customs were respected insofar as they did not interfere with the test of political loyalty. This test required the worship of Zeus as exemplified by complete submission to the absolute

3. The "loyal or pious ones" - לְיֹדְעֵי הַתּוֹרָה. See above, p.7

authority of the king as the god's representative among men. Of course such a requirement was bound to be resisted by the Jews.

To begin with there was unrest because of increased taxation due to warfare with Rome (Battle of Magnesia, 190 B.C.). As the result of a dispute between two Jewish "Hellenizers", Jason and Menelaus, and the disruptive activities of the Jews within his empire, Antiochus outlawed Judaism. The Temple in Jerusalem was desecrated and Jews were forced to submit to idolatrous practices on pain of death. Many did succumb but there were the inevitable heroic few who died or fled into hiding. Finally "the smoke became a fire" when Mattathias, a village priest, and his five sons fled to the hills after killing a Syrian officer and a Jew who had offered pagan sacrifice.

From a small guerilla-style insurrection led successively by three of Mattathias' sons: Judas, Jonathan and Simon, this resistance movement eventually became a full-scale war. The first of these leaders, Judas, was given the name "Maccabeus" which means "hammerer" and gave title to this whole period: "The Maccabean Wars". Because of their effectiveness and the prevailing international situation the Maccabeans gained Jewish independence for a century. Freedom did not end until the arrival of the Roman legions in 63 B.C.⁴ Subjugation was again in large part due to rival claimants to the office of High Priest and the resulting civil war.

Throughout this period of threat and persecution the

4. See Anderson, op.cit., pp.508-15

hard core of Judaism was fighting for its very life. In the midst of suffering the religious as well as the secular leaders of Israel (if such a distinction can be made), were seeking to strengthen the bond of the Covenant Faith in terms of the Law. On the political front the crude, nationalistic Book of Esther was so highly regarded that it achieved a place of esteem second only to the Torah itself.⁵ But in spite of Maccabean successes more and more of the faithful were realizing that the "fruits of the faith" were not necessarily to be found in this life. The growing belief in the fulfilment of God's purposes beyond history resulted in the development of apocalypticism. Apparently adapted from the Persian religion Zoroastrianism this "concern for the end of the world" became a meaningful and creative part of the Jewish faith.

Shortly after the outbreak of the Maccabean Wars an unknown writer composed the apocalyptic Book of Daniel. Although Daniel is the only apocalyptic book as such in the Old Testament it is not the only place where this type of literature is found. As a matter of fact apocalyptic thought manifested a deepening of the prophetic consciousness of Israel in the light of the suffering and humiliation endured during the entire period since the Exile in the sixth century B.C. Other books containing apocalyptic thought include Joel, Zechariah, Ezekiel and Isaiah (chap. 24-27) and many apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings (e.g., Enoch, IV Ezra also known as II Esdras - the Qumran War Rule or Battle Manual - IQM). But in Daniel there

5. Ibid., p.505

is a singular emphasis not found in the other apocalyptic passages of the Old Testament. Israel's continual defeat and chastisement would seem to negate her belief that God's way will prevail. Not so. Because the outside world has refused to accept the message of God mediated through His servant Israel He will bring the world to an end and vindicate the faithful beyond history. Thus two streams of Jewish thought are brought into harmonious union. Daniel is not only the culmination of the prophetic word of universalism, it is also a magnificent justification for Judaism's strict, unswerving allegiance to the Law.

The writer of Daniel was a member of the Hasidim who had the twofold purpose in mind: of justifying Judaism, and of showing that in spite of the present suffering of God's people, Israel, the Lord's purposes would eventually prevail. Daniel was a revered hero of ancient Israel (cf. Ezek. 28:3) and as such was described as the ideal Jew. Not only did he hold faithfully to the word of the Law but the result for him and his three young companions was success and honor. Daniel makes it plain that it is not their natural powers aiding them (Dan. 2:30). Rather it is God working with them enabling them to do more and better things than other men. Continually their prowess shines forth as with the three youths' abilities which exceeded the magicians tenfold (1:20); Daniel's interpretation of the king's dreams (2:30; 4:19ff.); and the reading of the writing on the wall (5:25ff.). They remain steadfast in their observance of the Law's requirements, in spite of the consequences. Particular emphasis was placed up-

on the dietary prohibitions. A good example of "Pharisaic" teachings at this time is illustrated in the Book of Judith. Not only do Daniel and his friends refuse the rich foods of Nebuchadnezzar's table (1:8) but they thrive on a simple fare of vegetables and water (1:9-16).⁶

Even so, strict observance of the formal law is not stressed in Daniel. It is actually taken for granted as the natural way in which one should conduct his life. Here observance of the Law can be seen, as in all aspects of the book, as the essence and central theme of the work. The empires of men may come and go but the true believer, that is the faithful Jew, will stand fast in his faith knowing that God's Kingdom is eternal and will prevail:

"But go your way till the end; and you shall rest, and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days." (Dan. 12:13)

Thus through the magnificent imagery of apocalyptic does the Book of Daniel justify the descriptive title many have given it: "Manifesto of the Hasidim".⁷ In this book as in no other the Jew is justified in his allegiance to the Law and given the hope of reward beyond this life.⁸

6. Cf. also The Song of Three Holy Children in the Apocrypha and Bel-Dragon and Susannah from the Pseudepigrapha.

7. Anderson, op.cit., p.515

8. Of secondary interest to this study but primary to any study of Daniel is the fact that here, for the first time in the Bible, there is an explicitly stated dogma of resurrection. In general, the nearest thing to Old Testament belief in resurrection took the form of continuation of life in one's descendants (e.g., God's promise to Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3). Following the writing of Daniel the dogma of the resurrection became basic to Judaism despite the attacks made in such

So as to better understand the nature of love and law as these concepts were interpreted in Jesus' day we will conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of love and law in Judaism. Categorization is often dangerous in such a study for Judaism, in spite of confessed faults, was (and is) too full and rich to be easily subdivided. But to facilitate our study the following areas will be dealt with: Hellenistic Judaism; Rabbinical Judaism; and brief references to the work of the historian Josephus and the philosopher Philo.

In studying the nature of "love" in the Old Testament we have discovered two basic factors about it. In terms of the Hebrew word chesedh (חסד), God's love is understood as steadfastness, a loving-kindness that will not be diminished or let the loved one go. On the other hand there is 'ah^abhah (אהבה) or election love which, though unconditional, has to do specifically with Israel. The essential characteristic of such love is its tendency toward exclusiveness. This exclusiveness is in the sense of preference and was for a specific purpose: the responsibility of service to all men!

"The love which is commended in the Old Testament is the jealous love which chooses one object among thousands and holds it fast with all the strength of its passion and its will, brooking no relaxation of the bond of loyalty."⁹

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8. writings as Ecclesiastes (cf. Eccles. 3:19). The Pharisees developed and generalized the doctrine while the Sadducees, finding no evidence for it in the Pentateuch, denied it.
 9. Quell and Stauffer, op.cit., p.32

Herein lies the strength of the divine love. The Greek Eros is basically universal, broadminded, undiscriminating, undisciplined. Eventually it is easily dissipated in a sentimental sense of concern for all men which often disappears when faced with the challenge of putting feelings into concrete action. The broad concept "brotherly love" is what Philia means. Keep it generalized with the wide scope of all mankind as its boundaries and all is fine. But bring it close to home in terms of a particular person and it evaporates in procrastination and excuses. Give the object of one's love a face and an observable need and Eros falls far short of the love God demands. Opposed to this God's election-love is specific: it chooses Israel; it is often harsh but for the ultimate good of the loved one; Israel is punished for her sin; it is sufficient: in spite of suffering Israel can rest secure in the strength of God's love.

But there can be a weakness in the recipients of this jealous love that results in Judaism at its worst. There is no question that at its best Judaism had the potential to fulfil even the universal concern for all men as voiced by Deutero-Isaiah. In actuality the exclusiveness of election-love was accepted as a right by Israel. What God had given freely as a gift, men took as their due. Where faith had been the joyous response to the gift of God's love, that love was now assumed as the reward for proper fulfilment of cultic requirements, namely, the keeping of the Law.

Hellenistic Judaism had real problems attempting to reconcile this inherited idea of love with the Greek ideal of humanity. Although God's love is a frequent theme in writings

of this period it always seemed to narrow down to Israel and/or Israel's approach to God through the Covenant (i.e., through fulfilling the letter of the Law) as the only possible way of receiving God's love. He loves His entire creation, but He loves Israel by name: "Thy love is upon the seed of Abraham, the children of Israel." (Psalms of Sol. 18:4). Even Philo, the most eloquent apologist for the Jews in the Greek world, shows the centripetal character of the Jew's love for his neighbor:

"The Jew must first show love to his fellow Israelite; he stands at the center; round him are proselytes and resident aliens; then follow enemies, slaves, beasts and plants in ever-widening circles until at last we arrive at the love of all creation."¹⁰

This was, perhaps, impressive to the Greeks but essentially Judaism had only been adapted to Hellenistic ways in terms of external forms. In reality there was no change from the exclusive approach to love. The Eros of "the overweening and unholy Greeks" (Sibylline Oracles 3:171) was not accepted.

Rabbinical Judaism came to essentially the same conclusion as the Hellenizers but without the difficulty of rationalization. The relationship between God and man is basically one of love. This is particularly the case between God and His Chosen People Israel. For Israel there is outstanding proof of God's love, the Law:

"Beloved is man for he was created in the image (of God); ... Beloved are Israel for they were called children of God; still greater was the love in that it was made known to them that they were called children of God ... Beloved are Israel, for to them was given the precious

10. Ibid., p.36

instrument; still greater was the love, in that it was made known to them that to them was given the precious instrument by which the world was created, as it is written, For I give you good doctrine; forsake ye not my Law."¹¹

It is astounding to note here what had become accepted among the rabbinate, namely, that the Law had been God's instrument of creation! Such an indispensable quality makes it easy to see how simple it would be to relate it directly to God's love.

The decisive revelation of love between God and His people is in suffering, even martyrdom, for one's faith. Christians cannot help but be impressed by the fact that this understanding of God's love entered into Jesus' contemplation of his mission. How much did the Jewish concept of martyrdom as portrayed in the Assumption of Moses influence Jesus? Though such sacrifice was considered most worthy and even was courted by some, it was by no means sought after by the majority of rabbis. Indeed steps were taken to restrict martyrdom and discourage pursuit of it by the zealous:

"live through them (the laws) but do not die through them." (Yoma 85b, based on Lev. 18:5)¹²

"If thou art commanded (by a ruler) to transgress all the commandments of the Torah on penalty of death, transgress all of them except idolatry, incest and the shedding of blood." (Sanhedrin 74)¹³

11. Aboth 3:15, Danby, op.cit., p.452. Underlined sentence is from Proverbs 4:2.

12. Quoted in The Jewish Encyclopedia, vol.8, article "Restriction of Martyrdom", p.353. The account of Akiba's martyrdom which follows was taken from the article "The Ten Martyrs", p.356.

13. Louis Newman, editor. The Talmudic Anthology. New York:

This last quote illustrates the casuistic tendencies that were a constant temptation in the interpretation of the Law.

Even though such reservations were made there were many instances of heroic martyrdom. One of the most moving of these was the story of Akiba ben Joseph who died during the persecutions of Hadrian for his open defiance of the Roman emperor's edict which forbade the teaching of the Law. He was cruelly tortured and yet showed such courage that his executioner thought him a sorcerer. Denying this he said: "I rejoice that I am permitted to love God with my life." Such a display of faith and love for God and His Law exemplifies the height to which Judaism could, and on occasion did, rise. Though it was only shown by the rare spiritual hero such love was potentially a part of the faith of all Jews. Most of the horrible story of Belsen and Buchenwald has not been told.

"Love is strong as death. Only the triumphant words of the Song of Songs come anywhere near giving a true idea of the elemental strength of this love ... Many waters cannot quench love; and the peoples of the world cannot tear Israel away from the love of its God."¹⁴

Where love of God is perfected in suffering that to one's fellow man is fulfilled through giving practical help. The first question here is that encountered by Jesus: Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). Essentially the Jew's answer was his fellow Israelite or a proselyte to the faith. Generally speaking love for one's neighbor halted at the frontier but

13. Behrman House, 1945, p.265

14. Quell and Stauffer, op.cit., pp.39-40

up to that point it was seen as a duty and a responsibility in fulfilling the Law. Thus Hillel could say:

"Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving mankind and bringing them nigh to the Law." (Aboth 1:12)

One's love for a neighbor brings the opportunity for evangelization - sharing the Law with them. However, it must be said that love should come from deeper aims than mere manipulation of the neighbor for the sake of the Law. The Jew is not to be compared with the furtive "Christian" evangelist of deserved disdainful reputation who is desperately seeking "to save souls". It was understood by the rabbis that love was not an act of compulsion but must be expressed as the result of deep-seated desire.¹⁵

Finally the rabbis saw that love between God and man and that between man and man were inseparable.¹⁶ The mercy shown by one man for another is simply emulation of the mercy God has first shown him. Conversely God treats men on the basis of their treatment of their fellowmen. Ultimately it is love rather than righteousness which is the basis of God's relationship to the world and of men to God and to each other. But in spite of the daring, and the truth, of such insight the great words about love remain isolated in Judaism. They threaten the entire basis of the Jewish view of God, the world, and life.

15. Ibid., pp.41-42

16. Cf. C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, London: Harper Bros., p.117: "The energy of love discharges itself along the lines which form a triangle whose points are God, self and neighbour."

"In spite of all, righteousness continues to provide the foundation for Jewish theology and ethics."¹⁷

Regarding "law" in Judaism there is little to be said for a Hellenistic position as opposed to the stance of Rabbinical Judaism. The non-rabbinical writings found in the Pseudepigrapha and the Apocrypha vary widely regarding content and language. In many respects they are open to the Hellenistic spirit but in matters pertaining to the law they stand as one in opposing any inroads.

"What is strongly maintained in all this literature is the absolutely binding, divine force of the law ... God's law is eternally valid."¹⁸

The reason for this was simple. Even though the Maccabean Wars had resulted in a certain tenuous sovereignty for Israel, it was not as easy as it once had been to determine a person's religious classification merely on the basis of his belonging to the Jewish nation. Therefore, his attitude to the law became the determining factor. Secondly, the historical circumstances of alien governments and of the Diaspora gave added significance to those aspects of the law which separated Jews externally from other men (e.g., circumcision, observance of the Sabbath, food laws).¹⁹

Actually in spite of strict observance the law was subject to Hellenistic influence of a sort. Because of the unavoidable contact with the Hellenistic spiritual and cultural world

17. Quell and Stauffer, op.cit., p.43

18. Kleinknecht and Gutbrod, op.cit., pp.52-3

19. Ibid., pp.53-4

there was a real attempt to show the law to be true wisdom and its observance as true reason.

"This (i.e., Wisdom) is the book of the commandments of God, and the law that endureth forever."
(Baruch 4:1)

"... he that hath possession of the law shall obtain her" (i.e., Wisdom). (Ecclus. 15:1)

This identification of the law with wisdom eventually led to the assertion that all men should keep the law. God's Torah, like Wisdom, becomes a universal law. In the Sibylline Oracles, (Book 3, Lines 57 and 58), we read:

"... a common law for men throughout all the earth shall the Eternal perfect in the starry heaven."

Whereas in the Old Testament the law had been the rule of life for the Chosen People, for Judaism attempting to reconcile itself to Hellenism it became "the timeless expression of the divine will with a validity of its own."²⁰

The law, therefore, has achieved the status of a divine intermediary standing between God and man. The ultimate result is hopelessness and despair for men. If they honestly acknowledge their sinfulness they realize that it is transgression of the law. Caught in the web of unavoidable sin a man must either despair or become a self-righteous hypocrite. Thus arises the lament of II Esdras:

"... for who is there of them that be alive that hath not sinned, and who of the sons of men that hath not transgressed they covenant?" (7:46)

As was the case for love, so in dealing with law Jose-

20. Ibid., p.56

phus and Philo were the Jewish intellectuals who were most inclined to Hellenization of their Jewish heritage. Josephus' understanding of the law was quite naturally based on Jewish thought with strong Pharisaic tendencies. But considerable adjustment was made by him to accommodate the rationalistic and moralistic world of Hellenistic thought.²¹

It is more difficult to determine Philo's attitude to the law for he was not a moralist but rather a mystic who had as his basic concern the achievement of a contemplative oneness with God. In dealing with the law his primary objective seemed to be a compromise between the Old Testament law and the Greek approach to world order on the basis of reason and natural occurrence:

"... Philo bears witness to the veiled, though actually unmistakable, disintegration of the law in favour of Hellenistic speculation and ethics, a disintegration brought about by allegorical exegesis, scientific reasoning and the reconciliation of moral principles, as well as by the preservation of the practice of the law."²²

To a degree Philo and Josephus exemplify that portion of Judaism that came to a deadend in the law - the deadend of dissipation wherein the stern rigor of the Law was compromised for the sake of a philosophical dilettantism.

In Rabbinic Judaism one term came to signify the whole of what was understood as law. This single, all-embracing expression was torah. Primarily torah is the whole of the Mosaic law but not specifically any individual part of it. Thus the Decalogue can be considered torah but is never by itself the

21. Ibid., p.61

22. Ibid., pp.61-2

Torah.²³ It is often difficult to distinguish between Torah as "Law" and Torah as the Pentateuch. Furthermore, at times its meaning seems rather elastic giving the impression that the entire Old Testament should be, (even if it is not!), understood from the standpoint of Torah:

"The Torah (i.e., the Old Testament) contains Torah (i.e., Pentateuch), Prophets and Writings." (Tanhuma 10)²⁴

Finally, in an extended sense Torah often means "authoritative teaching" (Tradition of the Elders) and should be translated and understood in terms of this phrase or as revelation rather than as "law".²⁵

Law, then, was understood by the rabbis entirely in terms of Torah. God revealed Himself in and through the Torah and it alone. Secondly, man's relationship to God is meaningful only in terms of the Torah. Without the Torah man cannot reach God or be reached by Him. Thus Torah supersedes the Old Testament concept that God revealed himself to Israel and, therefore, Israel owes obedience as her response to this revelation by God. The translation of the Holy Scriptures from Hebrew into Greek only added to the misinterpretation of Torah. In the Septuagint Torah is translated as νόμος. This Greek word is by no means an exact equivalent of the Hebrew תּוֹרָה. Fundamentally νόμος is "custom", hardening into what we call "law". It is

23. Ibid., p.67

24. Ibid., p.68

25. It would seem that Torah for the Jew is roughly equivalent to the Roman Catholic emphasis upon ecclesiastical tradition as authoritative in matters of faith and practice.

largely because of this narrower interpretation that Hellenistic Judaism came to see the Old Testament in terms of a narrow, legalistic perspective.²⁶

Because of the growing influence of the Torah, the Pentateuch, which is usually synonymous with Torah, becomes the predominant section of the Old Testament. Though authoritative in some measure the other sections (i.e., Prophets and Writings), stand in a dependent position with regard to the Torah. Thus the great themes of the Prophets and the Wisdom Literature become muffled if not entirely obscured. All relationships between God and man are subordinated to the Torah. It thus becomes the unimpeachable mediator between God and man. Judaism became "par excellence" a religion of the BOOK!

"The precise and consistent working out of the authoritative nature of the Torah is carried so far that God himself is conceived as tied to the Torah, studying it and observing it ..."²⁷

Such flagrant presumption regarding God and His authority in the world seems almost too bizarre for us to believe. However, before hastening to condemn we should remember that Medieval Scholasticism in the Christian Era did much the same thing in its aggrandizement of theological speculation and the unquestionable authority of the Church. The fact that we, as post-Reformation Christians, do not stand shackled by this particular form of legalism does not free us from the possibility of accepting a man-made system of faith. The moralistic pronouncements of a mid-

26. Cf. C. F. Dodd, The Bible and the Greeks, pp.25, 30-41

27. Kleinknecht and Gutbrod, op.cit., p.73

Victorian Protestant ethic still haunt the twentieth century Christian seeking a living encounter with God in Christ. Just as he did two thousand years ago Jesus Christ continually shatters our man-centered conceptions of him and the God with whom he would bring us into meaningful encounter. A simple evaluation of our protests as he shakes us out of our comfortable acceptance of "God" on our own terms should help us understand the shattering impact he had upon the proud citadel called Judaism.

CHAPTER NINE

GOD'S LAW FULFILLED IN CHRIST-THE COVENANT RESTORED

Following the period of tenuous independence achieved by the Maccabean Wars Israel again came under foreign domination when Pompey entered Jerusalem in 63 B.C. and set up Roman rule. Initially Israel came under the jurisdiction of Rome's representative in Syria with the weak and ineffective descendant of the Maccabees, Hyrcanus II¹, appointed as High Priest by Pompey. Essentially power was in the hands of Hyrcanus' chief minister Antipater, an Idumean who had a rapacious personal ambition. This was a time of political turmoil in Rome² at the end of the Republic and the beginning of the military dictatorship. Antipater and his son, Herod, managed to stay in favor with a succession of Roman leaders. In 40 B.C. Herod was named ruler of Judaea and Samaria with the title of king. Because of continued unrest and opposition to him as ruler he did not begin his reign until 37 B.C. From that date he remained in power until his death in 4 B.C. At his death this king, (now known as Herod the Great), ruled over Idumea, Judaea, Samaria, Peraea, Galilee, and a territory north and east of Galilee. It

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1. Cf. The Jewish Encyclopedia, vol.6, article: "Hyrcanus II" for a detailed account of this man's career and the intrigues of Antipater which led to the Herodian dynasty, pp.517-18.
 2. Julius Caesar was made dictator for ten years in 46 B.C. and was murdered at a Senate meeting two years later after he assumed a perpetual dictatorship. In 42 Caesar's successors erected a temple to the "divine Julius". This event marked the end of the Republic and the beginning of Roman Emperor-Worship which was to be an important factor in the future for the Jews and eventually Christians. (cf. R. M. Grant "Julius Caesar", I.D.B., vol.A-D, pp.478-79)

was this Herod who was ruler at the time of Jesus' birth.

Despite Herod's success as a puppet of the Romans he was despised by the Jews because of his Idumean ancestry and his constant attempts to Hellenize the land. He was a vain, ambitious, and highly suspicious ruler who used secret police and the threat of death as weapons of political power. He attempted to conciliate the Jews by starting the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem (20 B.C.) and by easing taxes and providing food in hard times. Even so, at Herod's death the Jews pleaded with Rome not to divide the Kingdom among his three sons as the former ruler wished. But with revolt rampant in Palestine Augustus approved Herod's will. Herod Antipas became tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea. Philip was made tetrarch of Ituraea and the area north and east of Galilee. The third son, Archelaus, was appointed ethnarch in Judaea but because of his ineffectiveness was removed in 6 A.D. Jerusalem and Judaea thus passed under direct Roman rule being administered by a succession of procurators of whom Pontius Pilate has become the best known. It was into such a political and social setting that Jesus of Nazareth came about 30 A.D. embarking upon a meteoric ministry of no more than three years duration that was literally to change the course of the world's history.

Before proceeding with an examination of Jesus' ministry and in particular his interpretation of God's Love and God's Law, let us take a moment to trace the course of Judaism from the time of Herod the Great to the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., an event which marked the end of the cultic ritual

that had been the focal point of the faith. Not until our own day with the rise of the modern state of Israel was Jewish nationalism again to be a force of any consequence in the world. The Old Testament came to an end in the Apocalyptic Age of the Book of Daniel. In the midst of persecution and frustration it closes on a note of vibrant expectation that the time predicted by the prophets was imminent: the dawning of God's Kingdom. The resistance to Antiochus Epiphanes and his successors was spurred on by Daniel and other such writings with their promise of the messianic age. But even with the success of the Maccabean revolution the promised time failed to come. After the Maccabees came men of little religious concern or zeal but with political ambitions that resulted in constant intrigue and deceit with the office of High Priest going to the shrewdest schemer. Into such a "den of thieves" came Rome, an empire that had not been foreseen by the author of Daniel.³

Throughout the period from the Maccabean Wars to the beginning of the Christian Era there was a continual internal as well as external unrest in Judaism. Just as periodic conflicts with Samaria and the rising shadow of Rome threatened Israel as a nation, so too the rise of various sects within Judaism sought to deal in their various ways with the threat to the God-fearing "Faith of the Fathers".

Basically the divergence of opinion came in trying to determine how the Jew must observe the tenets of the faith in a tumultuous and changing world. One group, the Sadducees,

3. Anderson, op.cit., pp.530-34

were outwardly liberal in their pleas for tolerance and compromise. They came from the priestly and wealthy classes and advocated acceptance of Hellenism insofar as it did not conflict with the Torah. It is interesting to see though that in terms of belief and practice the Sadducees were actually stringent conservatives. They were strict devotees of the Torah (the Pentateuch) and rejected all oral law which had formed around it. Because they were not found explicitly stated in the Torah this sect rejected the ideas of resurrection of the body and of the apocalyptic hopes engendered by such writings as Daniel. Their understanding of history was essentially that of the "P" or Priestly writer of the Pentateuch. This philosophy of history said that God's plan for the world had achieved fulfilment in the establishment of a theocratic community based on the Law of Moses. This community was maintained by strict adherence to the law personified in the priestly functions and exemplified by the continuance of Temple worship. In order to maintain such a status quo Sadducees were willing to compromise with Hellenism and accept foreign domination. Thus the paradox of liberal-conservatism.

Arraigned against the Sadducees were various groups tracing their origin to the tradition of the Hasidim. Regardless of their differences they all stood for strict devotion to the customs which separated them from the Gentiles. Chief among these groups were the Pharisees. Like the Sadducees they advocated strict acceptance of the Torah including devotion to the external signs of Judaism: dietary laws; rigid observance of the Sabbath; circumcision; and fasting and prayer.


Unlike the Sadducees they accepted the oral traditions outside the Torah,⁴ as well as writings such as the Prophets. The Pharisees were stricter than the Sadducees in that they would not compromise with Hellenism and only accepted foreign rule with reluctance. But they were more liberal than the priestly party in their interpretation of tradition and scripture. In this regard they accepted the doctrine of the resurrection of the body and looked forward to the apocalyptic Kingdom. Coupled with their aescetic practices and strict adherence to the law this hope of a future Kingdom of God brought the Pharisees into a kind of monastic order. The very name "Pharisee" means "separatist".⁵ Nonetheless the fact that the Pharisees enjoyed considerable influence among the common people as opposed to the Sadducees' upper class following meant that it was the former group which survived the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. rather than the latter.⁶

Two other groups of lesser importance for our considerations need only be mentioned here. They too followed in the tradition of the Hasidim. First of these were the Zealots, a political action group akin to the Maccabean revolutionists in their approach to the problems of the Jewish community. Con-

4. Codified in the Mishnah (c.200 A.D.) and later appearing in an expanded edition called the Talmud. See above pp.107, 120, 122, 124, 126 for examples of the wisdom of the Talmud.

5. Rudolf Bultmann, Primitive Christianity, p.63. But it was likely a "smear" word as was "Christian" in its origin!

6. Added to which fact: "The Sadducees, whose religion was inseparably bound to the Temple, were shorn of their raison d'etre by this catastrophe." Anderson, op.cit., p.535

tinuous agitation against Roman rule was largely sparked by this party and culminated in the war and defeat of 66-70 A.D. and the catastrophe of 132-135 A.D. The other group of interest is that known of as the Essenes (or a closely related sect) about whom much more is known since the discovery of their monastic community at Qumran located toward the north end of the Dead Sea. This group regarded itself as the community of "the new covenant" and separated themselves from the world in monastic seclusion. They lived a strict aescetic life of devotion and adherence to the Torah while awaiting the anticipated end of the world when the apocalyptic Kingdom would come in the wake of a holy war (cherem ) wherein the land would be purified of the contamination of pagan cultures and become the Holy Land.⁷

For all of these groups the unifying factor was devotion to the Torah. Depending upon where they stood in terms of this allegiance their fate was decided in the future. As Millar Burrows says:

"The tree whose trunk was the Old Testament had then many branches which later were lopped off or withered away."⁸

For all the war of 66-70 was to prove disastrous, a time of severe "lopping off and withering away". The Sadducees disappeared alto-

7. See William R. Farmer, Maccabees, Zealots, and Josephus, New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1956, chap.7: "War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness", p.161: "The Covenanters of Qumran stood over against the Sadducees on many counts. They were close to the Pharisees in some respects, though quite different from them in others. Their relationship to the Essenes was one of close kinship, if indeed they are not to be considered an Essene community."

8. Millar Burrows, The Dead Sea Scrolls, New York: Viking Press, 1957, p.345

gether as did the Qumran community.⁹ None of the parties maintained their former identity and only the Pharisees were able to influence subsequent Jewish life and thought to any marked degree.¹⁰

In the midst of this tumultuous era came the man who was to be looked upon by many - Jews and Gentiles alike - as the culmination of God's covenantal promise of a new beginning for His Chosen People Israel. Born in the pastoral village of Bethlehem, (or so tradition says), Jesus of Nazareth was raised in this larger town and at an early age was apprenticed to his father, Joseph, as a carpenter. When he was about thirty years of age he abandoned his trade and embarked upon an itinerant ministry in answer to God's call "to seek the lost sheep of the house of Israel".

From the outset his mission was clear: go to Israel with the Good News of God's offer of a renewed covenant relationship.¹¹ As Jeremiah said, God was now ushering in His Kingdom of righteousness and peace. There was a vibrant sense of urgency about Jesus' message. God's Kingdom was not a distant hope but a present reality - it was NOW!! At one point, when urged by his disciples to eat, Jesus rebuked them in like terms for their concern with

9. Speculation has it that many of the latter were assimilated into the Jewish Christian community which appears to have adopted many of the Essene practices in their daily and ritualistic life. (cf. Farmer and Burrows, pp.161 and 345 respectively).

10. Anderson, op.cit., p.535

11. However the word "covenant" was not actually used. Jesus refers instead to the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14, 15)

the less important things of bodily comfort and nourishment:

"'I have food to eat of which you do not know.'
 ... Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, "There are yet four months, then comes the harvest?" I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest' ..." (John 4:32, 34-35)

This note of urgency and the power to heal men's broken lives that was in him brought men to Jesus in great numbers. At times it was impossible for him to get away from the crowds. Even when he sought some time apart by embarking on the lake called Galilee they found him and begged that he speak to their need and satisfy their spiritual hunger (Mark 3:7-9).

But not all men were so impressed by this upstart carpenter from the "outback" who even had the audacity to claim God's power of forgiveness for himself. Inevitably as his fame grew and, what is more, as his claims began to appear to be valid, it became clear that Jesus and the authorities of Judaism were on a collision course moving toward an unavoidable climax. The devout leaders of the orthodox tradition, conditioned to a futuristic hope they only half believed would be fulfilled, were not about to accept the possibility that God was speaking to them through this wandering preacher and his bedraggled band of peasant followers. If only God would behave Himself and come into the world as we want Him rather than as He chooses!

Jesus did not make it any easier for himself when he berated the leaders of the faith for their criticism of his methods and the hypocrisy of their own actions:

"And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collec-

tors, said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?' And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.'" (Mark 2:16-17)

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to me, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." (Matthew 23:27-28)

Eventually Jesus and the authorities clashed with dramatic impact. The result: the temporary triumph of man's misunderstanding of God over God's offer of Himself as He really is, followed by the eternal triumph of God over evil in the victory of the risen Christ over death. In Jesus, now the risen Christ, God showed Israel the true meaning of the covenant. Complete and unquestioning faith and trust were what He demanded of them. In return He gave His promise of salvation and eternal life couched in a love that would never let them go.

This was to mean a "New Israel" no longer constituted on nationalistic or cultic lines but in terms of those who "believed on Christ". Before examining the nature of this new Israel through the eyes of the Apostle Paul we must first explore Jesus' place in Judaism, the "old" Israel, and how he interpreted the concepts Law and Love. This is an exceedingly difficult task for we do not have any direct report of Jesus' activities. Rather we must rely on the accounts of his ministry as given in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). These writings, though based in part on eye-witness accounts were the work of the early Christian Church. Therefore, their

record of Jesus' words and works are colored by their own needs and experiences. Still the Synoptics do provide us with a reasonably clear picture of our Lord's attitude toward the Law.

A cursory examination of many of Jesus' utterances would lead us to say, as many have, that he meant to repudiate directly the Law of the Old Testament. That is to say he came to re-place rather than to fulfill the Law. If this were so it would be a categorical denial of one of the basic tenets of the Judeo-Christian tradition: the faith is grounded in history, the basis of faith is God's mighty acts in history experienced and understood in the life and worship of His people Israel. It seems hardly possible that Jesus had such an abrogation of the Law in mind. And yet at first glance the incessant repetitions of Matthew 5 seem to support such an argument:

"You have heard that it was said to the men
of old, ...
But I say to you ..."

What we need to understand here is the legalistic turn of mind of Jesus' listeners, in particular the Pharisees. Their concern for the precise and proper understanding of the Torah led to a literalistic interpretation of the Decalogue and the great mass of judicial and casuistic law which had grown up around it. Thus when Jesus said "You have heard" he was saying in essence "You have understood literally".¹² So when he refers to the Sixth Commandment: "You shall not kill", he senses their inner satisfaction in knowing they have never actually slain their brother. But then he delves into the innermost recesses

12. George A. F. Knight, Law and Grace, p.66

of the heart exposing thoughts and desires as evil as the actual physical act of murder:

"But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire." (Matt. 5:22)

Such a piercing and profound interpretation does more than simply upset the complacency of these "lovers of the Law". It completely shatters all their elaborate systems of "exceptions to the rules" and "rationalizations for pet shortcomings". No man, regardless of how righteous he may deem himself, can escape from the fact that before God he is nothing and must accept it. He must seek God's forgiveness and gratefully accept His mercy offered to them who do truly repent. Even Jesus himself would not presume upon God's grace:

"And a ruler asked him, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone ...'" (Luke 18:18-19)

In the case of the food laws, the most evident of the great number of secondary laws in the Deuteronomic Code, Jesus does not explicitly deny them. However, as with his attitude toward observance of the Sabbath he advises that these laws are for man's benefit rather than man having been created for the sake of observing the laws. (Mark 2:27). Our Lord's attitude toward the food laws, and indeed all of the secondary laws, is best summed up by C. G. Montefiore:

"What comes out of the man comes from the heart, and the heart is the seat of religious uncleanness as it is the seat of religious purity. Things cannot be religiously either clean or unclean; only persons. And persons cannot be defiled by things; they can only be defiled

by themselves, by acting irreligiously."¹³

So we can see that though Jesus' attitude toward the Law was not in what might have been called the best orthodox tradition of his day, it was, nonetheless, conducive to the best understanding of man's relationship to God in the Israelite faith. He was reared and educated in the best traditions of the faith (Luke 2:40-52) and was familiar with the synagogue and the religious life that centered in it.

He was not primarily concerned with the annulment of the law and its requirements. Jesus' personal attitude to the law was proper and conservative. He went to the Synagogue on the Sabbath; was in Jerusalem at festival times; taught in the synagogues and in the Temple; and celebrated the Feast of the Passover. If and when he did "break" the law it was for one of two reasons: (i) in the interests of the emerging messianic community; or (ii) he reacted to certain situations in terms of immediate response to the will of God without any concern for its effect on the law (Mark 3:1ff.).¹⁴ In this regard he always gave priority to human need or the claims of the rule of God over the word of the law. We are probably unable to know exactly what Jesus' attitude was to the ceremonial law. But:

"... we can be sure that the moral demand of the law, as the expression of the will of God, Jesus never annulled."¹⁵

13. C. G. Montefiore, The Synoptic Gospels, vol.1, London: Mac-Millan, 1927, p.153. *Italics in the original.*

14. W. D. Davies, "Law in the New Testament", I.D.B., vol.K-Q, p.96

15. Ibid., p.97

To know this will of God - His claim upon us of absolute love - is to realize the impossibility of ever fully achieving it. Therefore, it is foolish for men to think they deserve praise or reward before God.

"This was at the root of the criticism that Jesus made of the scribal and Pharisaic tradition: that it assumed the 'achievability' of a right relation to God on grounds of obedience, whereas to stand under the will of God as love, as Jesus understood it, was to know that, when we have done all that is commanded, we are unworthy servants (Luke 17:10)."16

Standing within the tradition of orthodox Judaism Jesus challenged the presumptuous claims made by the leaders of the faith regarding God's plan for the world and their assumed place within that plan.

It was, therefore, as a full-fledged member of God's Chosen People Israel that Jesus came to the Jews preaching the prophesied Good News of the New Covenant. He was in full agreement with Jeremiah's understanding that God would not set aside the Law of Moses.

"The old covenant sets forth in shadowy form that which was to become reality in the new, and for that reason it has abiding value even when the new covenant has been established."17

He came, said Jesus, not to destroy or replace but to fulfill the Law. Not "one jot or one tittle" would pass from the law until it was fulfilled in its entirety (Matt. 5:18). This surely was a comforting word to the Jewish conservative for it would

16. Ibid.

17. Wilhelm Andersen, Law and Gospel, p.42

seem to validate the entire ceremonial law. But this was not what Jesus meant to say at all. His understanding of what actually constituted the law was closer to the view of the Sadducees than it was to the Pharisees. Like the former party Jesus rejected the oral law altogether. Thus he was able to bring the average Israelite back to a simple, unquestioning loyalty to God from the anxiety caused by such a believer's futile attempts to fulfill the maze of minutiae demanded by the rabbis before one could be sure the requirements of the law had been met.¹⁸

However, Jesus also broke with the position of the Sadducees for he could not accept, as they did, the literal words of the Torah simply at face value. To him the Torah, as for the prophets, was both the record and the revelation of God's saving purpose for the whole world. The fact that in time God's plan of salvation is revealed first to Abraham and then in terms of the covenant bond through Moses with all Israel means that the Law, though of basic importance, still is "a servant to the greater whole".¹⁹ Jesus also knew that in his own mission of fulfillment of God's Law he had a greater task than that of Moses. Rather than the Law of Moses as the rabbis thought, it was the Christ who had been with God the Creator in the beginning (Gen. 2:2-3; John 1:1).

What was the nature of this Law of God now fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ? Much has been said regarding God's Law as a "Law of Love" but none have said it as succinctly as

18. Knight, op.cit., p.99

19. Ibid., p.100

Jesus himself. In answer to the lawyer's question: "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" He brings together for the first time two familiar passages of the Old Testament (Matt. 22:36-40).²⁰

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

This inclusiveness of Jesus' demand for love subjugates all other commandments to it. No man has a claim to righteousness. Only the man who truly loves comes close to achieving righteousness.

Such love to God will not tolerate half measures. Man is presented with two radical alternatives:

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."
(Matt. 6:24)

God's demand is for our complete love given without reserve as the service of a faithful slave is given to his master (Luke 17:7-10). What is more it means looking upon God as the very ground of one's existence, upon whom you depend for everything. Jesus himself, the Son of God, asked for and received from his disciples such unquestioning love and devotion.

"After this he went out, and saw a tax collector, named Levi, sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he left everything and rose and followed him." (Luke 5:27; cf. Mark 2:14; Matt. 9:9)

Try as we may it is impossible to establish any former contact

20. See above p.11. The Old Testament passages are Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18.

between Jesus and the tax collector.²¹ Levi's simple, trusting love is illustrative of that which God requires from all men for Him.

In the second instance Jesus shows how one's love for God can never be divorced from love of neighbor. Here, as always, he speaks in terms of simple common sense.

"Like a good Jew, he takes the sober view of the matter, and simply tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves - avoiding the fanaticism both of a vague universalism and of the impractical idealism which says, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor more than thine own soul'". (Barnabas 19:5)²²

Even so Jesus shatters forever the nationalistic perspective of the Jew who would answer the query: "Who is my neighbor?" in a narrow way that rarely if ever called for personal sacrifice. In the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) Jesus places the responsibility for "the needy standing next to you" upon every one of us. Furthermore if the one at your side should be an enemy it makes no difference (Matt. 5:44). To him all men stand equally before God in their need and equally before each other in the need for love and in the responsibility to give such love without regard for personal cost.

In this commandment of love, personified by the very person of Him who proclaimed it, lay the heart of the New Covenant God was offering to His People. God likes covenants and it is in terms of covenants that "milestones in his advancing

21. Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, London: SCM Press, 1954, p.50-1

22. Quell and Stauffer, op.cit., p.47

purpose for the redemption of the world"²³ are marked. He made covenants with Noah (Gen. 9:8ff.) and Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 15 and 17) before forging the great Covenant with Israel, Abraham's descendants, at Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:3-6; 24:1-8). Still later, after centuries of apostasy and twisting of the Sinai Covenant by men to suit their own purposes, God gave promise of another covenant. Through the voice of His prophet, Jeremiah, God promised a new bond between Himself and His People Israel. It is important to remind ourselves at this point that God promised this new covenant to Israel. It was not the world at large or, as we are wont to assume, to us today in the Gentile Christian Church:

"But this is the covenant which I will make with
the house of Israel ..." (Jere. 31:33)

What is important to remember here is that this does not necessarily mean the Hebrew nation or people related by blood alone. Such was not the understanding of "Israel" by the prophets. We have seen that for Jeremiah "Israel" meant the Babylonian exiles who were to him "the saving remnant" of the Chosen People of God.²⁴

Jesus agrees with this in his instructions to his disciples:

"These twelve Jesus sent out, charging them,
'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no
town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the
lost sheep of the house of Israel.'" (Matt.
10:5-6; cf. Ezek. 34; Jere. 23:1-4)

There was no question in Jesus' mind regarding who should receive

23. Knight, op.cit., p.69

24. See above p.83

the Good News of God's promised New Covenant. It was with the people of Israel that the old Sinai Covenant had been made and it was to them that God gave the opportunity of making a new bond of allegiance and faith in Him and His power to uphold and save them. As if this command to the disciples were not enough to shake the Gentile Christian's complacent assurance of his place in the Kingdom, there are other instances which are even more disturbing. The Apostle Paul, (whom we will discuss later as the "Evangelist to the Gentiles"), is definite about whom Christ came to serve:

"For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised (i.e., the Jews) to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ..." (Rom. 15:8)

For Paul the content of the New Covenant was to be preached "to the Jew first" (i.e., to the people of the old Covenant). He repeats these words "to the Jew first" no less than three times (Rom. 1:16; 2:9, 10).²⁵

In the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matt. 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30) we have conclusive evidence of Christ's understanding of his own mission. Answering this Gentile woman who begs him to heal her sick child Jesus says:

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matt. 15:24)

The fact that Jesus does heal the child in no way changes the woman's unworthiness to receive what Christ had to offer. In every instance where Jesus gave healing for the body it was secondary to the greater gift of the Gospel which he held out

25. Knight, op.cit., p.70

to the people. It was not so much that the Gentile woman as a person was unworthy of this greater gift. Indeed it was because of her partial awareness of Israel's preferred position and the glimmer of true faith that shone through her paganism that brought Jesus to answer her need. But in not being a Jew the woman simply did not have "the heritage of Israel" which would have prepared her for the New Covenant. Even among the Jews, those who had been prepared for the New Covenant through their relationship to God in the original Sinai Covenant, there were many who did not understand what Jesus was doing for them. This was the Messianic secret which could only be understood by those who accepted Christ in faith. Many who were healed by Christ or saw him healing others were told to keep silent about what they had witnessed (Mark 1:43-44; 5:43; 7:36). Jesus was concerned that his actions would be misinterpreted simply as miraculous cures rather than as signs of God's New Covenant, a Covenant made in and through Himself.

George Knight has aptly described the worthiness or unworthiness of the Jew and the non-Jew to receive God's New Covenant in Christ in terms of a parable about a wedding feast. It was a feast prepared during the centuries of the covenant bond by God for His bride Israel and now was complete in the Good News of Christ. To give this Gospel to non-Jews would be like letting in pigs to trample and devour the rich feast prepared over many centuries.

"If allowed in to the Feast the pigs would get what they wanted - their bellies filled; the Syro-Phoenician woman would get what she wanted - her daughter cured. But neither could appreciate the significance of the Feast

that was laid before them ... His loving purpose was simply incomprehensible to any woman living outside of Israel, ... it was Israel alone that had been prepared to receive the fullness of God's loving purpose - and that was because Israel possessed the Law which God had given her through Moses at Mount Sinai."²⁶

This is not to say that this woman, and many other non-Jews like her, were excluded from the Kingdom. Just because they were not a part of the Covenantal fellowship of Israel did not mean they could not share in the joys of God's Kingdom. At no time is God limited to His preferred covenantal approach to men. Christ understood this when he referred to those outside the Covenant who would nonetheless be in the Kingdom.

"There you will weep and gnash your teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out. And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God."
(Luke 13:28-29)

The tragedy was that Jesus was not really saying something new in this warning - Israel had been told as much before (see Isa. 49:12; 59:19; Mal. 1:11; Ps. 107:3). But to the Jew of his day this was blasphemy of the most serious nature. If there was one thing the Jews prided themselves in it was the fact they were not Gentiles. Besides they assumed a "dog in the manger" attitude about this "heavenly treasure" they sought to contain within such inadequate "earthen vessels". It was like trying to capture moonbeams in a coal sack. God would not be denied - even when they took the Living Reality of the New Covenant and nailed

26. Ibid. pp.71-2. Italics in the original.

him to a cross.

Even then it was hard for men reared in the faith of Israel to learn to share this Good News with those outside the religious heritage of the patriarchs, Moses and Mount Sinai. Only after long and tortuous torment and struggle was Paul, who said Christ "was of their race (i.e., Israelite) according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:5), able to say in effect that all, Jew and Gentile alike, could claim kinship with Christ according to the Spirit:

"... not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants; but 'Through Isaac shall your descendants be named.' This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants."
(Rom. 9:6-8)

Perhaps the best example of how difficult it was for the Jewish Christians to accept God's call to go to the Gentiles is found in the story of Peter's encounter with Cornelius and his family. At the very time when Cornelius' servants were seeking Peter he had a vision of many animals, reptiles, and birds descending from heaven on a great sheet. A voice came to him commanding him to kill and eat but Peter balked:

"'No Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.' And the voice came to him again a second time, 'What God has cleansed, you must not call common.'" (Acts 10:14-15)

But still Peter was hesitant. It was only after he had gone to Caesarea and seen the great faith of the Gentile Cornelius and his household that he understood what God had said to him in the vision:

"Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality,

but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35).

From this point on Peter's ministry is to the world rather than to Israel alone. To varying degrees others of the Jewish Christians concerned themselves with taking the Gospel of Christ to the Gentiles. Of these one stands head and shoulders over the rest: the tentmaker and Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, who became Christ's greatest champion, the Apostle Paul.

In the life, the work, and the writings of Paul is the culmination of the new situation created by God's act of love: the New Covenant in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of mankind. Therefore, we will conclude our brief study of Love and Law with an examination of Paul's interpretation of these concepts as he stands "in Christ". The primitive church into which Paul came as a convert of mature years was at that time struggling with the question of the place of the law in the faith. There were those who, largely because of their rich Jewish heritage, felt that acceptance of the law was mandatory for anyone who would become Christian. The growing number of Gentile converts resulted in increased tension over this issue.

Some took the radical position exemplified by Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Their attitude toward the law was ambiguous like that of Jesus. They recognized the claims of the law but rejected it. Of greater concern to them than one's attitude to the law was the proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah. Though this emphasis was accepted as valid the basic position of the radicals was rejected.

"Stephen's wholesale dismissal of the temple,

and, by implication, of the law, and his condemnation of the people of Israel, were not embraced by the church, which found his attitude too radical, and the problem of the relation between law and gospel too complex, to be thus summarily solved."²⁷

Not until Paul's explanation of the new Covenant in terms of a relationship with the Holy Spirit was this position in any way acceptable (cf. II Corin. 3:4 - 4:6).

With the spread of the Gospel among the Gentiles this question of the place of the law in the faith had to be dealt with. At the "Apostolic Council" as reported in Acts 15 and Galatians 2 the problem was discussed with the conclusion reached that the Gospel as preached by Paul was in agreement with that accepted by the Jewish Christian community. It was also agreed that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ not in the law. Nevertheless the law was still to be obligatory for the Jews though not for the Gentiles. This seems to indicate the recognition of the need to keep the missions to Jews and Gentiles separate (Gal. 2:7).²⁸

However, this did not answer the inevitable practical questions which resulted from Jews and Gentiles living in one Christian community. For example: Could Jews by birth have fellowship with Gentiles at table and at the celebration of the Lord's Supper? Strict observance of the law forbade such intercourse with Gentiles. In spite of the decisions reached at Jerusalem "Judaizers", an extreme group, tried to overcome

27. Davies, op.cit., p.98

28. Kleinknecht and Gutbrod, op.cit., p.95

this problem by advocating acceptance of the law by Gentile Christians. They were particularly active in the Pauline communities and he condemns them in no uncertain terms (Gal. 6:12f.)²⁹

A second position in the primitive (or Jewish) church was that of James and Peter. It was essentially in line with the decisions of the Council and, therefore, committed only the Jews to the practice of the law. However, they did not regard observance of the law as a means of justification for man before God so were conducive to brotherly intercourse with Gentile Christians. In such instances they only asked the Gentiles to honor the rules suggested by James at the Council (Acts 15:20). With this concession by the Gentiles the Jewish Christians could defend their fellowship with these non-Jews before the Jewish community as a whole. Still the position taken by all but Paul and his few close associates was at best hesitant and indecisive. Even though they sought to placate the larger Jewish community, animosity developed. James, the brother of Jesus who was the elected head of the church in Jerusalem, was martyred in 62 or 63 by non-Christian Jews. Shortly thereafter the remnants of the Jewish Christian Church, under constant pressure and persecution from their fellow Jews, fled to the remote desert village of Pela. There they remained for some four or five centuries, cut off from the mainstream of the Christian Faith. The last heard of this group comes in references to them as an heretical sect (they were known of as Ebionites), in the writ-

29. There may be merit in the suggestion of Kleinknecht and Gutbrod, p.99, that one worthy motive of this group was to gain for Christianity the advantages which the protection of the Roman Empire involved for Jewry.

ings of church leaders in the fifth century. Their demise is a tragic example of how allegiance to particular precepts can often be a hindrance rather than a help in one's coming to Christ.

For Paul both love and law are focused and have their meaning in Jesus Christ as the crucified and living Lord. It is really impossible to summarize the faith of a spiritual giant like Paul. And yet one verse could serve as a summary statement of his belief that God's Love and Law culminate in Christ:

"For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (I Cor. 2:2)

Through God's act of love in sending His Son and through the cross wherein the act of fulfilment of the law is completed in Christ, Paul finds the focal points of the faith which have guided the Christian Church ever since.

Paul's understanding of the content of the law and his attitude toward it are determined by the cross of Jesus for it is this crucified Jesus who is, for Paul, the risen Christ. He accepts and rejects the law in terms of the cross. "The law is the good purpose of God"³⁰ for men. Because of man's inability to fulfill that good purpose God comes to him in the gift of His Son. Therefore, says Paul, the law is negated by the cross:

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification (or righteousness) were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose." (Gal. 2:20-21)

30. Ibid., p.106

Just as the law is the characteristic mark of the Jew so the Gentile striving to be acceptable to God has the concept of "the good" which sets him apart. Paul equates the demand of the law with "the good" and in this way equates the positions of the Jew and the Gentile standing before God.

"... a man's wrongdoing is equivalent to the Jew's transgressing of the law. In the same way knowledge of what is good is equivalent to acquaintance with the law."³¹

Thus neither Jew nor Gentile can excuse himself: neither the former for neglect of the law in favor of some alternative good nor the latter because he does not know the law. By the same token neither Jew nor Gentile can call himself righteous because they keep the law or follow some other good. All have sinned and fallen short and are bound together in the unity of their need for faith in Christ.

"... since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus ..." (Rom. 3:23-24)

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28)

What specifically are the values and the drawbacks of the law as Paul interprets its meaning for and bearing upon the faith of the Christian? To answer this question we turn to the outline presented by W. Gutbrod.³² Until the coming of Christ it was in terms of the law that God spoke to the sinfulness in man. It is thus in terms of the relationship of the

31. Ibid., p. 108

32. Ibid., pp. 110-14

law to sin that Paul evaluates the law's strengths and weaknesses.

- (i) To begin with the law forbids sin. "The law's prohibition of sin expresses negatively the fact that the law is the good purpose of God." (Cf. Romans 7:12-14)
- (ii) By forbidding sin the law reveals it. Sin is there within man but through the command of the law he is made more acutely aware of it and it is thus brought to life.

 "What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'" (Rom. 7:7)
- (iii) In revealing sin the law also helps man realize the enormity of sin - it is revealed as a pervasive and deadly power. What is more this knowledge of sin makes ridiculous the efforts of any man who would seek to rectify his transgressions of certain aspects of the law through strict obedience to others.
- (iv) The real effect then of the law is to keep a man subject to his sin. Through the forgiving grace of God man can escape this bondage by faith in Christ.

 "... before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith." (Gal. 3:23-26)
- (v) Herein lies the weakness of the law for it can do no more than bring to light and condemn sin. It cannot free man from his bondage to sin - that is only possible through faith in Christ.

 "... who has qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life." (II Cor. 3:6)

To understand this negation of the law by Paul it is

necessary to see it from his perspective centered in the cross. In the cross God justifies and forgives sinful man thus establishing anew man's relationship to Him. This is in no way the result of man's effort, indeed one might say that it is in spite of man's misguided efforts on behalf of the letter of the law!

"Righteousness before God was bestowed on man through the cross not on account of what man did, but because he was taken up in mercy into this death, that is to say, through faith."³³

That is why Paul can, and indeed must, say:

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death."
(Rom. 8:1-2)

In a positive sense the cross affirms the law in that it is the fulfilment of the law - what the law has been pointing toward. In the cross the law's sentence of condemnation for sin is affirmed. The purpose of the law - obedience to God and love for men - is achieved in the cross. Through faith men can thus fulfill the law's purpose. Salvation then, does not come to a man simply through a chronological progression through the law to the cross and Christ. Rather it comes in the acceptance in faith of what God in Christ has done for him. Christ, the Person, replaces Torah, the Law. In fact, Christ is God's Torah.

"Sin is no longer that which does not proceed from the law but that which does not proceed from faith." (Rom. 14:23)³⁴

33. Ibid., p.114

34. Ibid., p.118

Thus the law is acknowledged as a binding force upon the Christian but only insofar as it is accepted and understood as the mirror held up to man to show the futility of his efforts to justify himself before God. In the cross the man of faith has the most dramatic example of this futility and of the fact that it is God alone who can alter this situation of frustration. In terms of man to man confrontation the cross shows Jesus' complete obedience to God and his great love for his fellowmen for whose sake he is willing to die to this life. This is recognition of the law in terms of complete fulfilment of it. From the perspective of the men who perpetrated Christ's death their act is a defense of the sanctity of the law. The resurrection, knowledge and understanding of which can only be appropriated by faith, makes complete the real purpose of the law. It shows how men had misinterpreted the law. The real purpose of the law, to show men the magnanimity of their sin, is vividly portrayed. Finally in the resurrection men are shown that it is only this act of God, not of men, which can bring them salvation.

All of this, says Paul, is so because of the mighty act of love by God in the sending of His Son, Jesus Christ, to be the Savior of mankind. For him the love of God is clearly understood.

"It is the directing of God's sovereign will towards this world and its salvation."³⁵

Such love in action has been the aim of God from the very be-

35. Quell and Stauffer, op.cit., p.55

ginning. Ever since Abraham's day God has foreseen His people free from the domination of the law. In the Epistle to the Galatians Paul shows how God has created such a people through the sending of His Son and now, since Christ's death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit. This Spirit is the spirit of love (Gal. 5:2-6:10) that comes to those whom God has called to be His witnesses to the world of this new age which has dawned. God's love is not an indiscriminate thing which diffuses into the world to be lost in a wave of good feeling. As with His election-love with the people of the Old Covenant God's love in Christ in the New Covenant is specific - Jesus Christ - LOVE! As Paul interprets it this means predestination (in the same connotation as Hosea's proleptic use of the word "harlot" in Hosea 1:2-cf. page 63 above). The apostle quotes the Old Testament regarding God's unconditioned sovereignty in loving and hating, choosing and rejecting (Rom. 9:13, 25). Those chosen by God from out of the great mass of sinners in His "kindness and severity" (Rom. 11:22) now stand in an unbreakable fellowship of love and peace.

God's aim in this act of love is a new man, a Christ-man, a CHRISTian. This is the man who, by his own action in faithfully following Jesus, seeks to respond to God's call. In other words man in this new relationship to God is free, free to accept or reject His offer in Christ to him. On the part of man the active response of acceptance is, strangely enough, a passive acceptance of God's will for his life. When we passively accept our complete dependence upon God, he in turn responds with the Spirit which ...

"... makes us for the first time really alive as responsible human beings ... the Spirit sets (us) free for the highest form of activity - in love. Freedom binds and perfects itself in love."³⁶

What is the final purpose of this divine love? It is not simply our response of love to God nor that we should have freedom for the sake of fulfilling personal desires. Rather it is that we should put ourselves in love and freedom at the service of our neighbor.

"For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Gal. 5:13-14)

Thus does Paul, having in mind at all times God's love for us through His gift of Christ, condense into one single commandment the essence of the law. For him, as for Jesus and as purposed by God, the law fulfilled in Christ is to bring men in freedom under bondage to God into the only meaningful fellowship of love the world has ever known and for which this universe was created.

Here then is the Biblical solution to the problem of Law and Love in the Christian life. The answer must lie in a "dialectical complimentation" of both Love and Law. These are polarities in creative tension - the fusion of Torah and Grace which can be seen as an Idea in the Old Testament and as the Divine Idea in a Person in the New Testament - **ΤΟΝ** and **ἸΝ** Incarnate!

"... speaking the truth in love, we are to

grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love." (Eph. 4:15,16)

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of the love ethic tracing back through the prophets to Moses and the patriarchs was still there.

Throughout this word study there will be considerable reliance upon three sources. They are mentioned at this time so as to keep the use of footnotes from becoming excessive. From the "Bible Key Words" series translated from Gerhard Kittel's Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament we have used "Love" by Quell and Stauffer and "Law" by Kleinknecht and Gutbrod. Professor Norman Snaith's The Distinctive Id of the Old Testament has been invaluable as a theologically interpretive discussion of these terms.

1. Love in the Old Testament

At the outset it is necessary to determine the appropriate words used in the Old Testament to signify "love". Secondly it will be necessary to briefly outline the meanings of these words in secular and religious usage. However as we are primarily concerned with "love" in terms of God and His relationship to man, and as all secular relationships are dependent upon a man's place in the sight of God, it is the latter of these two categories with which we will be most concerned. It might be added here that a similar emphasis will be made in the discussion of "law".

Quell and Stauffer refer to two primary root words in Hebrew as the most common ones used to express the idea of love.² The first of these is 'anebh (אָנֵבֵּחַ) and is used in relation to both persons and things or actions as well as being used, (in the derivative noun form אֲנֵבֵּחַ), to describe God's unconditioned love for Israel. Snaith therefore calls 'ah^e bhah God's Election-Love.³

The second basic root given by Quell and Stauffer is rachem (רָחַם) which appears

2. The basic root of most Hebrew words is a verbal form. Unlike English and many other languages, in which the infinitive is this verbal form, in Hebrew the third singular masculine perfect of the simple form, (known as Qal), is the root. (e.g. he broke) Unless otherwise indicated it is this root that is given throughout this study.

3. Snaith, op. cit., p.95.

*Since you find the source so
a complete footnote is necessary*

"Jack Truheart" out of some of the worst bounders and cads known to history. The names of David and Jacob are two of the more prominent among many. We fail to see that God was not looking for goodness. Whether we like it or not we must accept the fact that God's love goes to those He chooses. It is the unmerited love of Charles Wesley's hymn, "He hath loved, He hath loved us, because He would love".²¹

Some would say that such love is irrational. But such a position assumes that the limits of man's reasoning powers encompass the limits of rationality. Others say that God's love is arbitrary. This is true to the extent that He chooses in ways that are unintelligible to us but in no way is His love capricious. God's thoughts are not ours nor are His ways our ways. "How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!" (Romans 11:33).

Perhaps the most difficult characteristic of God's love for men to accept is its exclusiveness. This is inevitable in a love that involves choice and speaks of "election". Though this is hard for many this exclusiveness is central to both the Old and the New Testaments. The perennial question is: Why is this one chosen and that one rejected? To begin with God chose this one because He loved him. Secondly we can say that God rejects on the ground of persistent, unrepentant wickedness. Such rejection can include the seemingly chosen as well as those considered outside the pale. In Christ the accepted boundaries of acceptance and rejection were broken. Because of ~~him~~^{Christ} as the supreme manifestation of God's love all men who turn to God in and through him can find acceptance just as all can choose, in their rebellion, to be rejected.

The second category of God's love, namely Covenant-love, is represented by the word chesed (חֶסֶד). The root means "eagerness, steadfastness" and secondly "mercy, loving-kindness", but it must always be considered in terms of a covenant. This negates its meaning "kindness" in a general way.²² Thus the possibility of a syncretistic "watering down" of God's love for those with whom he first made the covenant into a generalized benevolence for all men is avoided. Such a limitation was important but it resulted in a narrowing tendency that proved fatal to Judaism as we shall see

21. Methodist Hymn-book, London: Wesley Conference Office, 1904, #64 "God of all grace".

22. For which Hebrew uses the word chen (חֵן). See above fn.6, p.4.

thinking. In Genesis 29:31 and Deuteronomy 21:15-17 are two cases of rival wives, in each instance 'the loved one' is the one who is preferred, and 'the hated one' is the other (cf. Matt. 6:24; 10:37; Luke 14:26ff.; etc.). Here we can see, (as in Malachi in spite of the writer's bias), that the root '-h-a' is used to indicate choice in both religious and secular contexts. This is the way in which the Covenant came into being. God loved Israel—that is He preferred her before all other peoples. She is His chosen, or preferred or elected people.¹⁹

Such a love has certain characteristics that must be examined. To begin with it is an unconditioned love. God chose Israel and has known only them "of all the families of the earth". (Amos 3:2). The word "know" in Hebrew has a much deeper meaning than mere intellectual awareness.

"...when Amos says that Jehovah knows Israel, he is referring to the most intimate personal knowledge that is possible, ... The intellectual bias in the word 'know' is Greek; the Hebrew bias is personal."²⁰

God's choice of Israel had nothing whatever to do with any special merit, whether real or imagined, on her part. The schoolboy ditty:

"How odd of God,
To choose the Jews"

perhaps is more profound than it is intended to be for the element of chance is certainly there. All that can be said is that God found Israel and he loved her. Thus God says in Hosea 9:10:

"Like grapes in the wilderness,
I found Israel.
Like the first fruit on the fig tree,
in its first season,
I saw your fathers."

This is most difficult for men to accept. Time and time again we say that it is impossible for God to love Israel unless there is something worth loving in the loved one. We can't admit that there is nothing in us worthy of God's love and it is hard for us to accept such a totally disinterested love. Because of our blindness at this point we are faced with some impossible mental gymnastics trying to make

19. Smith, op. cit., p.134.

20. Ibid., p.135.



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